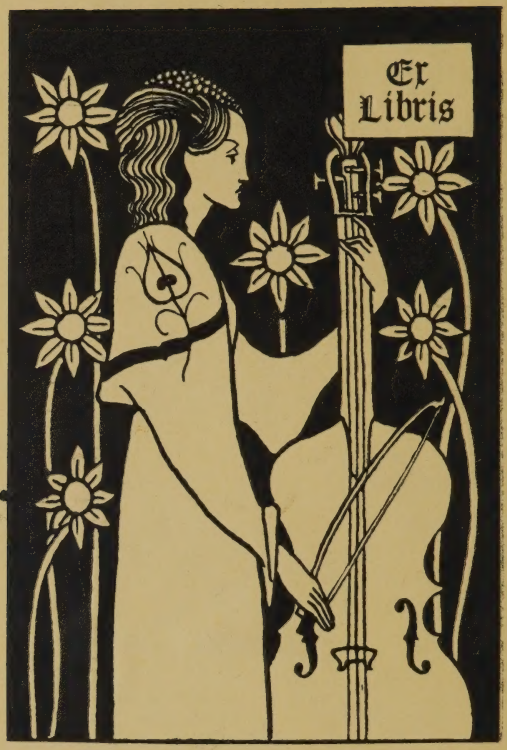
Odd Pairs

LAURENCE HOUSMAN



Rainforth Armitage Walker

O D D P A I R S

★

By the same Author

ANGELS AND MINISTERS
POSSESSION
DETHRONEMENTS

★

A DOORWAY IN FAIRYLAND
MOONSHINE AND CLOVER
TRIMBLERIGG
ALL FELLOWS AND THE CLOAK OF FRIENDSHIP

A Book of Tales by

LAURENCE HOUSMAN

ODD PAIRS

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Preface

Four of these stories have already appeared in magazines. One, in the public sense, is new; but all were written a good many years ago.

The dates of their composition have for the writer a certain interest. They are here given, in case they may also interest the reader.

L. H.

I

The Two Widows of Chadsey

In the last fifty years Chadsey has changed little to the eye. But though most things there stand outwardly the same, time flows through them like a river, and many of its records have gone; and had not the old Rector remained, and led me down to see once more the old church, with his naughty 'restorations,' of which he was so proud, I should not have recovered in its native setting the story which I now tell.

Passing through that village which has no centre – the sparsely-grouped cottages bordered by old-fashioned gardens, all so well known to me – I wondered whether the strangers who looked out from them were the descendants of some with whom I had been friends in my youth, or were even themselves old acquaintances under a changed aspect, – whether the same families still joined histories under the same roofs, and how many Pardoes and Harrups and Tracys were yet left to give the locality its old colour of genealogical interest.

Seated together, by the south porch, on a grey mouldering tombstone, we talked long, the old Rector and I, of the village worthies we had known at different stages of their lives; for though I was the younger man, my knowledge went back further, he having succeeded to the living only after I had left.

'In this place of milestones,' I said, pointing to a slab near by, 'my own eyes tell me a good deal of what I would wish to know. Grand old John Daffern lies yonder, I see. I never hear the phrase "English yeoman," but I think of him. At what age – I can't read it from here – did he die?'

'He was eighty-three,' answered my companion. 'Yes, he was a veritable landmark: the finish to an old order. His was the last smock-frock that used to come clean to church on the Sunday morning. We never see them now; solemn black has become the fashion.'

'I see,' said I, 'that the local love of gardening still makes a show here among the graves. Whose is yonder, rimmed round with lavender ? – Susan Bannier:–I can't recall that name; a new-comer, perhaps, after my time?'

'No: you will remember her by her maiden name of Susan Pardoe, I expect; rather a celebrity she was in her day.'

'I remember her well. She used to be called the Belle of the Village, and carried her head high about it, too. Then she did not after all marry young Tom Waldron? I thought she had made up her mind on him, and was but playing the poor fellow to please her own vanity. All the girls were said to be sighing for him, such a handsome chap he was; but he was easy and simple and had little sense of his own importance.'

'It is strange,' replied the parson, 'that you should have singled out that one grave from the rest, and coupled your inquiry with those other circumstances, as you have done; for you have at once touched to the very root of the whole story. Susan Pardoe, as you see by that stone, did not become the wife of Tom Waldron: so the tragedy began. Not that I think they would ever have made a comfortable match together; but anyway it fell out otherwise. You shall hear the whole history if it will interest you.'

I said that it was bound to: so, sitting there, I heard the tale out, and give it you again as my informant told it. Some of it he had from the mouths of the two women most

concerned, the rest from one or another of those who had been eye-witness of some of the incidents here recorded. My interest, when he began, had been merely to learn the after-history of Susan Pardoe, here set down on stone as 'Susan Bannier, aged fifty'; but before the end it had gone almost wholly to another woman; and it is for her sake that I now recall the narrative as he gave it.

★

You may, or may not, he began, remember Jane Fletcher, the old carrier's daughter; for she was a quiet retiring sort of woman, and was much tied, up to the time I speak of, by attendance on her old bed-ridden father. When he died, which is the date at which my story commences, he left her the cottage, and that was about all he did leave her. She used to go out charing, and, I think, did a little field-work; and, as the way is, having a cottage of her own, it was an understood thing that Jane was there, to be had for the asking by any decent man – with just a little picking and choosing allowed on her part, maybe, seeing that she was a freeholder.

Well; time went on, and Jane's picking and choosing began to be remarked, for she was not so young as she had been, nor had she much in the way of looks to recommend her: good eyes, keen and rather hard-looking in a square face, with high cheekbones that early became prominent in a way that takes off from youthfulness. It began to be chaffed about the village that she was waiting till Susan Pardoe had done playing fast and loose over Tom Waldron, and that then she meant to have him.

This was told to Tom, and no doubt to Susan also; for before long, in one of her tiffs with him, she made play on the same tack, and bade him go and give Jane a turn – she

that was dying to have him,– and not come wasting her time any longer.

Some think he only did it to bring Susan up to scratch, knowing her to be truly set on him, and jealous into the bargain; some that he wanted to show his independence of the woman who so plagued the life out of him. Anyway, to Jane he went, and put the question – would she have him? And fast enough she said yes, without waiting to be asked twice.

The news, when it came out, caused a good deal of talk about the village, for Jane was not only his senior by something like ten years, but she was reputed pious; and Tom, though a good enough fellow in his way, was not much of a church-goer, and he had his weaknesses besides. He came of a hard-drinking family; but he was, at that date, a steady wage-earning fellow, and popular with all; that was his chief danger.

My own notion is that Jane was one of those women whose mothering instinct is masterfully strong in them: what, if we want to give the thing a hard name, we call 'a managing woman'; and an easy pliable man, who would let her manage and keep him straight, and get credit for him, was the one for her. There is no doubt that in her strange way she loved her man, having got him, and showed a grim contentment at owning a neat home ready and waiting for him.

Then, of course, the busybodies must all turn their eyes on Susan Pardoe to see how she took it; for Jane Fletcher and Tom Waldron began forthwith to keep company in state, and an early day for the marriage was announced.

Susan held her head up, and was seen on the first Sunday, as they met on their walks, to wish the couple good day

with a saucy patronizing air. Tom eyed her with a sort of sheepish defiance; but he took his new sweetheart home by a roundabout way to avoid a second meeting. Susan, for her part, was reported to have said that Tom had managed to find his level at last: and the trouble she had had to make him!

Two or three days later she let it be known that her own choice was Bannier, the publican, new come to the 'Buck's Head,' a widower, and a man of some substance according to our small reckoning.

Their banns were up first, and they were married first. The Waldrons, coming together some three weeks or a month later, took up their abode at Jane's cottage.

I saw them soon after they were settled in; and I should have said then that they were happyish in their relations. The house was the perfection of neatness, and though Jane had already adopted a benevolent scolding tone, bidding her husband do this and be that, speaking to him as 'You, Tom,' and of him possessively as 'mine' – a term tyrannously embracing in sound,–nevertheless Tom seemed to be contented under her tutelage. 'She do brush me up with her tongue,' he acknowledged; 'but, you see, she's a bit my better, and that's the way it comes out.' And his explanation of the case meant philosophic submission to a just decree.

After three years of wedded rule, Jane presented her husband with a son, to her own intense satisfaction. In those early days of maternity, when she carried the small Jim in her arms, her face softened and seemed to acquire a new light. I have seen Jane Waldron in wrath, and I have seen her nursing her young, and on each occasion I thought she had beauty. You could not define it: it was

soul not flesh that stood out before you, making the rugged surface on which it rested appear comely: sunlight on stone, you might say, for her face did not move, and I never saw her smile in all the years I knew her.

Now whether that aspect of her struck the jealous eyes of the woman she had supplanted, or whether it was that the other having no child felt injured by the comparison, I cannot doubt, in view of subsequent events, that from about this time Susan Bannier began definitely plotting to undermine a happiness that she envied.

I have told you that Tom came of a not too steady family; but under Jane's management he fell submissively into the groove set for him. He brought her his week's wages regularly, and out of them she gave him fourpence a night to spend up at the inn.

All this was private between them, and even between them was hardly put into words: it was an understood thing that at half-past nine he was to come home. Now and then, for an event, he was unpunctual in his return: she had her word ready for him then. Tom, simple sly chap, took it as right payment, and did not complain. His dread was to be pointed at publicly as a man without freedom, henpecked, he that had been a gay young cockerel in his bachelor days; so, for a manifesto, he took now and then more margin than his wife allowed, and bore what followed with an easy mind, since for so small a payment he kept up the appearance necessary for his self-respect.

Susan Bannier was probably by this time remote enough from his thoughts; she had risen above his head, had married a man of substance, wore a green silk dress on Sundays, and only descended to the bar-parlour on great

occasions. Truth to say, her looks were going off in the opposite direction to Jane's: while the one thinned and became metallic to look on, the other filled out and frowsed. Yet she had a taking way that appealed to some men; not least, perhaps, to her old lover when she tried it on him once more. Think charitably of her now, as she lies there!

A temporary indisposition of her husband's was Susan's first excuse for making a regular appearance behind the bar. When he returned to his work she had already accustomed his guests to her presence; and the inn did no worse business because of that.

I gather that at that time she used to take rather less than small notice of her old flame: she would sit in her corner doing ornamental needlework, so finding it easy to be either absorbed in her material or to join in the conversation that went on round her. Tom might talk – for he was reckoned good company in those days,– then would Susan be silent; others might follow, Susan would throw in her word. 'Twas so naturally done that probably none but Tom Waldron himself took note of it.

One night there happened to be a lull in the round of talk: Susan looked up suddenly and addressed Tom direct. 'Tom Waldron,' says she, 'do you know that 'tis after half-past nine?'

Tom did know well enough; half-past nine was 'about his time,' so he would have said; but to-night was one of his choice nights off, one of his methodically planned days of independence when he intended to go home late and get a scolding. Susan's remark (for she had had her eyes on things) came like an arrow at the joints of his harness.

Tom, sly to encounter and turn the shaft, owned that he

had been looking at the clock, for clocks did vary so; he believed this at the 'Buck's Head' was a good six minutes faster than his own; maybe she did that to get rid of them betimes. Well, he would trouble her for another half-pint, and then he would take her time in his head and carry it home to compare. So the matter passed: Tom just a little too explanatory and diffuse for the air of ease he wished to assume; for his eye had been running anxiously to the clock, as his way was when calculating how much overtime he should take.

But the thing stuck in his mind; his habits had become too regular for safety. Bowing his head to the storm that greeted him on his return, he was yet meekly resolving that he must incur the like in yet greater proportion the next night as well.

The next night Susan Bannier's eye went to the clock: her tongue struck the hour. 'Tom Waldron,' says she, "tis after half-past nine.'

'So it is by your clock, Mrs. Bannier,' he replies, smooth as can be; 'by mine 'twill be five minutes more, so I reckon. But we baint so particular as to time when we're here, be we, neighbours?'

'Oh! I thought half-past nine was your time for getting home,' she replies with a touch of significance in her tone.

'Well, so it is generally,' he replied, and stayed on till ten. He left owing for an extra pint, explaining that he would pay for it on the morrow.

On the morrow no Tom came. Poor Jane had made a beginning of the end, and had cut off supplies. The next day was Saturday.

Tom, they say, was in great form that night at the 'Buck's Head,' singing and joking and standing treat all

round. On Saturday night, in the natural course, more liquor flowed than on other nights, wages being then fresh in pocket. Things, therefore, were fairly well on when at about half-past nine the door opens and Jane Waldron enters.

You would be thinking, perhaps, from what you already know about her, that Jane's method was that of the high hand and the stretched-out arm, and that she would have plucked forth her man as a brand from the burning before all eyes, careless save to declare her own authority.

That it was not so done gives to my mind a double pathos to the event. Stubborn of will as she was by nature, the poor soul had already recognized her mistake, and was seeking by all means in her power to repair it. She had, I believe, until that night, never set foot in the place to which she allowed her husband to come nightly; and her appearance now caused an arrest of all talk and laughter about the room. Men looked on with an unquiet suspicion that something was to happen in disturbance of the general ease.

The sudden hush of voices made, I doubt not, the ordeal of speech more difficult for her. She stood in the doorway, supporting in both hands a heavy bundle, 'terrible strained-looking,' an eye-witness told me afterwards, as her eye searched round the room. Then sudden and brisk, 'Ah, Tom,' she called out, getting sight of her man, 'I hoped as I should catch 'e before 'e started home! This weight's near breaking my back: I should have took the perambulator for it, but I forgot. Do 'e come now, and carry it for me.'

Tom had by this time plenty of drink inside him, but he was not what is locally reckoned as drunk: 'just a bit

merry' was the definition of him up to this point. He got up steadily enough, showing no ill-humour or unreadiness at the request: thought, likely enough, that here was a good opportunity for peace to be re-established. He went across to his wife, to relieve her of her burden.

A voice said, 'I was just going to tell you, Tom Waldron, that it was half-past nine.'

Then, it would seem, that all at once he became conscious of eyes set on him, of ears listening, and that he stood a marked man in the midst of his small world, put to the test, about to be exposed and brought into derision. He took up his pint-pot and slung it across to the slab whence the liquor was served, and spoke out that all should hear him.

'I'll trouble you for another pint, m'm,' was his word. And Susan Bannier smiled.

Tom turned to his wife; putting on a hearty air, he cried, 'Come, Jenny, you have a drink too before we go home! Just you put that truck down.' And he began fumbling in the small leather money-bag he carried, for the requisite coin.

His wife stood hesitating at the door for one brief instant; then crossed the room quickly, and in hot wrath clawed bag and all out of his hand. There was no longer any disguise of her meaning then.

'Now come on with you!' she cried, loud enough for all to hear.

Tom's face put on a stubborn look. 'All in good time,' he says. 'We'll have our drink first, you and I.'

'Not a drop!' cries Jane, and has the money in her pocket that all may see whose word is to be law.

Cosy of speech, as if wishing to allay the trouble that

has arisen, 'It will be all right: you can owe for it,' says Susan Bannier: and, suiting action to word, fills up the pewter.

Tom, with a fending hand, as though expecting his wife to make assault on the interdicted draught, lifts the pot, and waxing bold of tongue, 'Susie,' he cries, 'here's to you! Don't Tom Waldron me no more! I was Tom to 'e once.' Speech went under to beer.

'Now, Jenny, there's for you!' he says after a full draught, setting down the pewter before his wife. Furious, and with sudden hand, Jane seized it and sent the contents flying into Susan Bannier's face. 'You jade!' she cried. General uproar drowned what else she had to say.

Lookers-on came to intervene, for it looked as though further violence threatened. Yet all made way for her quickly when, with a blazing face, she turned and strode out of the door. Only then did men breathe freely again, for in wrath Jane Waldron was the strong man of them all. 'All lit up, she looked,' was the report given me by one who had been there. I saw that same look myself later, though she was of cooler blood then.

So all the world knew that Jane had been keeping a whip-hand of her husband secretly, and had now publicly failed.

The next day was Sunday: and for the first time since I came into the parish Jane Waldron was missing from her accustomed place in church. She never came back to it.

Hearing something of the trouble I went at once to see her, and found her hard and cold as a stone. Her man had been brought home to her helplessly drunk, had lain on the floor till she lifted and carried him up to bed. Was she to be a church-goer after that?

Among our poor folk church-going is a subtle mixture of worldliness and something better:– perhaps it is so with the higher classes as well – anyway, I could never get Jane to see that religion had anything to do with her when her family pride had been all brought to dust. Only once was she moved to speak with rough eloquence, in answer to my pleadings, the reproaches that filled her soul. Thereafter she remained respectful but mute, immovable, unprotesting, unaffected by my words.

I remember even now some of the bitter things she said: 'Why did God make me if it was to be like this? Why did He make us man and wife? Why did He let my boy Jim be born? Why did He let us be happy together for four years, deceiving-like, if it was to end this way?'

'It hasn't ended,' I said: 'you are alive and strong: your husband is the same. The good in him is not dead because of one fall. There you have your task before you, not to be faced in anger: think of it as sent to you from God. Trust Him to know best.'

She shook her head resolutely: deaf to my words she seemed. Yet five years later she repeated them word for word. Poor Tom was dead then, and had come to no honourable grave.

Those five years form the record of a long struggle, in which the woman was the protagonist. She faced her lot with a resolute mind; there was no pettiness in the warfare she waged, and it seemed not so much against her poor erring husband as against Fate that she pitted her strength. He, indeed, felt the weight of her hand, as you shall hear; but I believe her set object, while seeing her man becoming a wreck, was to save her boy from being carried on a like course; so that through him she might stand respected

once more by those amongst whom she had to live.

Her affection for the child was a rage, an anger, you might say; never a soft word did he get from her, but never, I think, rough usage. She had a ruling tongue, and would stand firm as a rock while delivering herself in storm: Bellona shouting over the battlements of a fortress. But there were occasions on which her hand was lifted up to smite, though not on small Jim.

The change of conditions did not fail before long to set its mark on the cottage which had once been the pick of the village, and Jane's pride. Tom no longer brought his wages home with weekly regularity: Jane got what she could out of his trouser pockets on Saturday nights: – he was the gentlest drunkard I ever knew, maudlin not truculent, and wondrously at a loss for the use of his limbs by the time he had gone through the open air to his own door; so he let her rob him of her dues, or what remained of them, without resistance. Often his wife found little enough, for he had now a weekly score to clear off on the slate at the 'Buck's Head'; she kept house on what was left over from that and the payment of one night's potation, as long as was possible; when it was no longer so she returned to her charing and washing, putting Jim out to a neighbour to be looked after when work carried her from home.

Her house was clean enough, you may be sure, though she often returned dead-weary to the labours of her own hearth; but it no longer shone; nor was her flower-border the thing it had been to look upon.

To her husband, I fancy, she was far less of a scold at this time than she had been in the days of their happiness: he had passed out of her hands, she could not remedy him.

But the house and little Jim were her possessions still; over infringement of her rights there she could be terrible.

One Sunday Tom sat at home, recovering from his last night's debauch, till at midday he shambled forth to fetch in his dinner beer, since Jane would neither fetch that herself nor allow Jim to. Coming back with the full jug, he was met at the threshold by the child asking for something to drink, the day being hot; and his mother for the moment out of the way, Tom, meaning little harm by it I dare say, stooped the jug to the child's lips. Small Jim sucked till the froth choked and set him coughing. Just then Jane came upon the scene.

That was the first time she laid violent hands on her man; but it was not the last. The silly fuddle-head took meekly the blow she dealt him, only by way of mild retaliation he kicked off the fire the pot wherein the Sunday dinner stood at stew. He was an even easier prey when the drink was actually in him; and having found to what an extent she might exercise physical authority over him Jane did not scruple thereafter to apply it as she thought fit; not vindictively but as a remedy, others failing her, hoping that some good might come.

Finding it did not, poor soul full of charity, she let it go, or revived it only when, as before long came about, Tom took to carrying off small household articles to pledge for his necessities. For Tom, once started, went his own pace along the downward path without faltering, and when out of work had no scruple as to the means by which he satisfied his craving.

He died at last of a chill that fell heavily on his enfeebled constitution one cold wet autumn. He had kept a kindly though a weak sort of conscience up to the last;

I never came across a less rancorous character of those that fell by drink. I was at his bedside before the end. The visitation of parson he recognized as a thing to be gone through on his way to the grave: as it was my duty to speak, so it was his to listen and assent; he made no resistance to good counsels.

'Jenny,' said he to his wife when she joined us again after our talk was done, 'I've been a bad husband to 'e.' 'Ye have, Tom,' she replies; 'but that's over now. Why speak on it?' 'Well,' says her man, 'then ye'll look after the boy when I'm gone.' And with no touch of irony in her tone, Jane replied, 'I'll look after him, Tom.'

So, having made his peace with her, and committed to her hands the things he had left undone, Tom Waldron a few hours after shuffled off the frayed coil of his life, and left his widow to find in his absence the ease she had so long lacked. He lies away over there, behind Susan Bannier, with no stone over him, and no one to lie beside him. The story does not end with him.

Fate, it seemed, meant to keep up a sort of parallel in the lives that most concern this history; for almost on the same date that saw Tom's troubles end, Susan Bannier's husband died, also of the publican's complaint; his stone stands there side by side with hers.

Susan was by this time monstrously fat though not yet forty, all her beauty was blown from her – perhaps bar-life had had something to do with it – but even after her husband's death she could claim a sort of importance in the locality, having money enough to live on at her ease, and even with a certain display. She sold the goodwill, and took the first house you come to on your right entering by Long Chadsey, the one standing solitary with

the large flower garden in front; for Susan had a soft place in her heart, full though it might be in other directions of envy, jealousy, and strife; and flowers were her delight; perhaps I should be more correct if I said 'pride,' for to have the eye of a neighbour directed enviously across her border was, I think, what she loved best. Yonder she lies hedged round with lavender, but her taste was not so quiet in life as that little 'garden of sleep' would seem to indicate. She loved things that fluttered and made a show, red and yellow and blue, all stripes and varieties; her garden plot grew vivid with sharp contrasts, no one could pass without stopping to look at it.

As far as she was able, stooping her unwieldy bulk, she tended these with her own hands; but she had a man in to help in his off-time two or three days a week, which means luxury in a place like Chadsey. She carried off prizes at the flower-show, and sent the handsomest contributions to harvest festivals: altogether she had found a harmless outlet for the vanity and ambition which were always the ruling note in her character.

Jane meanwhile (I need hardly tell you the two widows were on the curtest of speaking terms) went her own quiet way with a single mind, set on the upbringing of her boy. She sent him down to weekday and Sunday-school a polished object: there was not a healthier, better-looking child about; it was easy to see he was the joy of his grim mother's heart.

Jane worked hard during the week, and by degrees brought her cottage back to its old pride of place among those to which it stood neighbour. She lived at Little Chadsey, right away at the other end from where her erstwhile rival had set up house. Sunday she regarded

strictly and materially as the Sabbath, and rested on it: never, at least, did she stir out in the direction of church. When I endeavoured to recall her to the duties she had once practised so regularly she was honestly outspoken upon the point. 'I don't forgive, so I won't say the words,' was the just impediment she urged; and I know that it was not against her husband that she cherished that grudge. I could have named one on earth to whom the remark bore a direct reference; but I am not sure that its import stopped there. The task, as I had named it, which had been put upon her, destroying her own schemes of comfort and happiness, was now ended in apparent failure, and Jane could not reconcile herself to the Task-master; with all respect, she kept to her opinion that she had been unjustly treated. Yet, illogically enough, she sent her boy to get his Christian training, weekday and Sunday, as I have said. She was wrapped up in the child's welfare, working herself to the bone that she might give him a good start in life.

At the time I am telling you of now, or am about to tell you of, when an uneventful series of years in Jim's mental and physical upbringing comes unhappily to an end, Jane was close upon fifty, Jim a well set-up lad of fourteen, more like his father than his mother both in looks and character, but perhaps a bit harder to manage now and then, even at that time; on occasion something of his mother's masterful character would show, and he would seize his liberty with less meekness than poor Tom. Against that you may set that the grim woman who strove to rule him to her ways had secured his love.

Jane had become a fierce blue-ribbonite, with cause enough, you may think; and I imagine that Jim's ex-

perience of alcohol had been limited to the one sip his father gave him on the occasion I have told you of.

Now Saturday, which was Jim's holiday, was for Jane the hardest work-day of the week: it is also, as you know, Banbridge market-day. Now and again work so hindered her that she could not get into town to do the week's shoppings; then she would ask a neighbour to make the necessary purchases for her, sending Jim along to carry the basket. One Saturday the neighbour had already started before Jane could get round to her; so, for the first time, and very proud of his promotion, Jim goes in charged with the commissions himself.

Now I have to piece the story together from different sources; 'twixt one and another this is what it comes to. Susan Bannier, driving to market in the small pony-trap she used to hire for the occasion, overtakes Jim with his baskets, trotting away solitary into town, and thinks that to give the boy a lift is an easy way of spiting the woman toward whom she still feels enmity. Jane is sure to hear of it and be displeased.

Jim, a mere pawn in the game, is ready enough to spare his legs by riding; so he was seen by neighbours in the early afternoon bearing Susan Bannier company to the inn where she stabled her pony; by the boy's account Susan also offered to drive him back; he was to meet or wait for her there at a time fixed.

Four hours later, when dusk is already changing to dark, Jane, done with her tidying-up after the day's work, is beginning to be uneasy over the lateness of his return, when a neighbour enters bringing news. A mile from home Jim has been found lying, with spilled groceries around him, in no condition for making the rest of his

way home on foot. The baskets are brought in for evidence, but the boy himself was too heavy a burden to be carried, and lies still presumably, waiting to be called for.

Without question asked or word spoken, Jane goes out swift of foot to the place indicated, finds there, even as she has been told, the wreck of her heart's remaining pride, and bears him home by slow degrees, for Jim was a big fellow for his years, and Jane was no longer in her first vigour. She puts him to bed, seeing the likeness to his father strong then as never before, and lets question wait on returning consciousness.

About ten o'clock that comes, and she gets a name – the one she had expected. Susan Bannier, after years of quiescence, has returned to strike vengeance: – the pot of beer,– Jane has it back in her face at last!

It was past her own bed-hour, but no rest was for her then, till she had seen this thing out. Half-past ten, or thereabouts, Susan Bannier, retiring to rest, hears the garden-gate clang, and quick steps approaching the door. She puts out her head from an upper window in answer to the knock, and inquires who it is that comes so late. Jane calls 'Come down, Susan Bannier, and tell me what you've been doing to my Jim!' Whereupon the window is clapped-to, without answer vouchsafed.

At intervals there follows knocking and a cry, 'Susan Bannier, will you come down?'

The cry begins to annoy, triumphing over the quietude of night: Susan, not a woman to let silence stand long in the place of words, thrusts out her head once more, and lets invective go against this importunate disturber of her rest.

Jane, insistent, cries, 'Do you not mean to come down?'

'No!' replies the other, 'respectable folk wouldn't be out at this hour.'

'Then you won't come?'

'That I'll not! I've already told you as much.'

Susan's ultimatum, even while it was being uttered changed into a cry. In the dimness below she saw the intruding figure fall from words to deeds, a body that stooped earthwards, wild hands catching and tearing roots from earth, and the flagged path from gate to porch becoming strewn with mangled forms.

'Come down! Susan Bannier, come down!' cried Jane. Action and cry kept repeating one upon the other and did not cease, as the garden became a wilderness. With bitter exultation the desolate woman wreaked her wrath and sent up challenge to her foe above. 'Come down, Susan Bannier,' she cried, 'come down!'

That night the grooms sleeping at Foxalls, a quarter of a mile away, woke and heard cries filling the night: 'twas like the fighting of wild cats, they declared, and lasted some twenty minutes by the clock. The next day Susan Bannier was in bed, and the doctor sent for; and a fortnight later Jane Waldron was up before the Bench for assault and battery. Only her previous good character saved her from imprisonment: the provocation, fairly proved, also counted for something against the savagery of the assault; she escaped with a heavy fine. Susan Bannier bore the marks of that night to her dying day. Strange, is it not? to think how she lies there under that border of lavender – at peace now: while about the other I do not know.

God forbid that I should speak of any soul as utterly reprobate; certainly I would not in Susan's case. But I believe that from this time for a while the Devil entered

into her; and two eyes for an eye, and more than a whole jaw for a tooth became her code. She did her work quietly, and had to bide her time for the doing of it; for, to begin with, Jim had not yet reached the full independence of youth. But Susan, with all the following she had from her days as hostess at the 'Buck's Head,' was able to make a long arm, using as her tools a good many easy-going fellows, steady in nothing but their attendance at the inn-bar. Employing these old familiars, Susan worked her will.

From many of her neighbours Jane now received the cold shoulder, for she took little pains to enlist public sympathy; retiring on herself she grew haughty and sullen, resenting even a friendly word on the matter that lay ever at her heart. Jim might have had to share the shadow of his mother's unpopularity, but Susan's set took him up, treating him as already of man's estate and a game fellow where anything active was to be done. 'Tis the flattery that most appeals to youth. Jim was a strong forward lad for his years, and sportive by instinct; so what was more natural than for him to take such opportunities as offered for a little rabbiting or rook-shooting, with perhaps now and then a bit of poaching thrown in, for that, I may tell you, does not count as wrongdoing among our folk, but only as a bit 'unsafe': and for a boy,—why the thing is almost natural.

Jim, like his father before him, held his mother in great awe; but her tyranny was chiefly upon her own hearth, and largely the outcome of a passion for cleanliness. On her own domain he let her rule him with a rod of iron: but, to right the balance, took his hours of liberty, and went and came without being too much questioned, so long as his returns were punctual and his body decent for meal-times. Jane was not a suspicious woman; and Jim made

no concealment of how he passed his leisure. Still, at about the time he left school and went to work, his mother told him the main facts of the family history, and got a promise from him not to touch strong drink. Just to remind him she sewed a blue ribbon into his coat: 'That's your promise to your mother:' said she, 'keep it!' The sort of mistake a woman makes in dealing with her mankind, not recognizing sufficiently the different conditions under which temptation is thrust on them.

Wearing a badge was not likely to make Jim's task easier for him amongst those with whom he consorted, more especially as he had already taken his glass with the rest, and no harm done; a fact which he had feared to own to his mother, when the solemnity of her story put the curse of drink before him in such uncompromising colours. No doubt when he gave the promise he meant to keep it, not having the experience to know its difficulties. We extract vows far too lightly from the young, without regard to character. How long Jim held out, I don't know: the end was, he failed.

One reaping season Jim had been out harvesting, working with other extra hands against time and a threatened break-up of the weather. His mother, therefore, was not anxious when at a late hour one night he had not returned. They were, she knew, carting the last piece and hoping to get it all up to stack before the change came. Leaving the door unlocked, she went up to bed. Sleeping I dare say lightly, with half an ear open for Jim's return, she was roused a good while later by a stumble on the stairs. Jim, trying to creep undetected up to bed, had slipped and gone down half the flight – no great fall. So Jane came on him lying at the foot of the stairs: like father, like son, and the

thing to do all over again. Jim was conscious of her, and tried no disguise to his condition. He cried out to her 'Forgive me, Mammy!' as she lifted him and set him on his feet.

Good or bad, she said no word to him then, nor a word the next day; and Jim not daring to begin it, watched her and hung his head. But when, so he told me, he saw her go for the kettle to the hob, and stand there pressing her forehead to the wall, – she, so quick and turnabout in her way of doing things, – he could stand it no more: he cried out to her 'Mammy!' and then sat waiting for her to turn.

'Well?' she said, keeping her head hard where it was, till he spoke again.

'Mammy,' said he, 'afore I did it, I took off the ribbon you gave me. I kep' my word to 'e. But I'll not wear it again.'

She turned round at that. 'Are you going to be a drinker, Jim?' she asked him.

'Please God, no, Mother!' said he. But the event turned out contrary to his prayer. Hold off he did for a time, and was never a day-in and day-out drinker as his father had been; but between whiles he had his great falls. At such times he was a different man from his father: he had his mother in him as well.

Quite early Jane had to learn that. She bethought her of the old remedy, that had been no remedy before but had done no harm, and tried it once when Jim lay helpless under her hand. Never again.

The next day Jim, sober, wore a terrible face, speaking no word to her; till, going out, he returned presently bearing a bottle of his strong enemy in hand. And 'Look you, Mother!' said he, 'what you done yesterday, isn't never to be done again! You pass me your word for it, and this cork stays where it is.'

Jane strove to face him down; but it wasn't to be. He put his hand on her saying: 'You may put up with me, Mother, or be rid of me; you've only to say the word. Aye, and you may pray for me if you will! But ever ye do *that* again, then I'm past praying for: know that!'

Somehow she did know it, and thereafter let him alone. Jim, for his part, walked straight at times (no one could be better or steadier then): but he managed badly enough for himself at others. Ill luck would have it that his trips brought him into collision with his employers; he lost two places, and, work being slack just then, too proud to be a burden on his mother, went in haste and enlisted.

So he passed out of Chadsey.

Jane for a while remained on, keeping house by herself. At first Jim reported well of himself, but after a time it was easy to see that the barrack life did not suit him. Then one day Jane, without warning to a single neighbour, left house and furniture in an auctioneer's hands to be sold, and passed, too, out of sight.

I learned afterwards that it was to Jim that she went, following him from place to place, picking up what living she could, and caring little so long as she could keep her lad Jim in sight, and be there with a helping hand when he needed her.

Once I got news of her. She wrote, for I had begged her to remember me as a friend: Jim had been made a corporal. She seemed really to have grown proud of him again,—though in her eyes to be a soldier was a disgrace. Then,—well, then came the end.

I never had the heart to try to get behind her bare word of it: 'My Jim's dead, because they put him back in the ranks.' Poor soul: she was an old woman to look at when

I saw her that last time; and poverty, almost penury, marked her from head to foot. Ah! but you have to hear first the tale of her return.

I have but her own brief dazed account to go by; I do not know whether she even waited to see her son buried first. She walked the whole way, so she told me; and the distance was over forty miles. Like enough she did it all in one day, her brain filled with one burning desire that would give her no rest. So it was night, and late, when she got to the outskirts of Chadsey; and, by the way which brought her, Susan's was the first house she must pass.

Pass it she did not: the reason being that it was her goal. Aye! maybe you had guessed so much! Up in the bedroom window she sees a light, and seeing does not stop to knock first. 'Tis not Susan you must pity now.

Jane Waldron's cries failed to reach the ear at which they were aimed; but a hand threw open the window in answer to the summons. And there was Jane madly at work – truly a mad woman at that moment, I think – and as she clawed left and right, sparing not a thing that grew, 'Come down, Susan Bannier, come down!' was her cry.

A voice called over her head. 'For God's sake,' it cried, 'who is it making all this noise, and a dead woman in the house?'

'Where's Susan Bannier?' called Jane from below. 'Tell her I say she's to come down!'

Answering remonstrance was of no avail: Jane, with full hands, lifted her head and again demanded that her foe should be delivered to her.

The woman at the window, recognizing her voice, uttered an amazed outcry. 'Mrs. Waldron,' she called out, 'is that you?'

Jane was in no listening or answering mood; but 'Listen!' cried the woman, and trembling and weeping, broke into loud lamentation. 'Oh, Mrs. Waldron, do 'e hold your peace for a moment! Don't 'e call out at her in that dreadful way! It makes a soul shudder to hear 'e. She's dead, I tell 'e. Susan Bannier, that you are calling out for, is dead! She's dead, woman! can't 'e hear me speak? It's God's truth I'm telling 'e.'

Thus she fought and fought against the clamour below to make herself heard. A sudden silence told that the word had at last carried home. Up at the window-sill a whimpering voice went on: 'She's dead; yes, Susan Bannier's dead. I've been telling 'e, but ye won't listen to a word!'

In a changed voice withered and thin, Jane spoke at last. 'No, no,' she said, 'that's not true; it's not likely to be true! Why do you lie so?'

'Oh, Mrs. Waldron,' cried the other, now in her turn offering deaf ears, 'if you was coming, why didn't you come before? Why didn't you send word? "Tell Jane Waldron to come!" says she, "tell Jane Waldron to come!" It was nothing but that, morning, noon, and night. Yes, and when parson himself come, 'twas just the same; and not a soul knew where to send to 'e. "I can't die," she says, "till I've seen Jane Waldron! God forgive me!" says she, "but if I don't see her, He never will!" Ah! poor soul, she had it on her conscience to speak to 'e what was in her heart! And 'twas only ten minutes ago that she died, and nobody with her but me. Come in, Mrs. Waldron, and look at her! She'd wish 'e to see her. Come: wait one moment while I go down and open the door.'

So much, I gather, was said from the window to the other standing speechless below; but when the neighbour,

who had been nurse to the dead woman, making all haste came down and unbolted the door, there was the garden full, as you may say, of death-beds, but Jane Waldron was gone.

By the woman's own account (and I have no reason to doubt her) she could not have been more than a minute. 'I left her,' she said, 'looking up at the window; and she had something in her hand then. But there wasn't a sign of her when I got down.'

Cannot you, too, see her standing so, waiting while the whole horrible realization of the fact worked into her brain?

Only a minute: but hear Jane's side! That gives you a glimpse of what suffering may do, stretching time to the rack: 'I waited and waited, but she never come down to open the door; so at last I went away. She was right enough not to let me in.'

I had this from Jane's own lips, three days later. She spoke them like one estranged from all the world, in manner humbled and subdued,– a different woman from the one I had known, and not a worse one.

I met her at dusk in one of the lanes outside the village, but could not prevail upon her to come in. When I asked her where she was staying, she just threw back her head, indicating generally the direction from which she had come; from such an action one might infer that she had no more confined lodging than the woods or the fields. It was evident that she sought solitude and wished not to be stirred from it. After that I feared to hurt her by any questions at all; I just left her to speak, and, when she had done, had to let her go her own way, knowing that for the rest of her life it was best that she should seek her lot among strangers.

Very briefly she told me of the main events that had brought her to this pass of broken body and spirit: of Jim's death, of her own late coming to Susan Bannier's door, and for what purpose; of the news that met her there, and of the door that seemed for all her waiting never to open. Whither she went then, and through the rest of that night, I cannot suppose that she herself had any sure knowledge; only when daylight returned she recognized that she was in familiar country, and found that in her hand she was still holding one root out of all that she had torn up from the dead woman's garden.

She dwelt much on that; I could not make out why. 'I've put it into earth again,' she said, 'but I doubt if it'll live. Maybe Susan'll not wish it if she knows what I done.' Hearing her talk so, I thought she must be strange in her head; only later did I understand what 'putting it into earth' meant.

There at the foot of Susan's grave is where Jane Waldron set up her token, and left it believing it must die.

I heard from the sexton that, after dark, on the day when Susan's mound was heaped over her, a woman was seen to be stooping over the grave, and tending it in some way: and the next morning he found a tree of lavender set there, all withered and crestfallen, but carefully planted and propped and watered.

For a time it seemed as if it would justify poor Jane's prophecy and never show fresh signs of life, though I directed that all care should be taken of it. But after a while it revived and took kindly to its new soil: all that you see there now comes from it, sprung bit by bit from the parent stem.

If poor Jane lingered about the spot for a time, I fear

she saw nothing to encourage her faint hope that Susan would allow the tree of forgiveness to thrive over her place of rest. Yet 'tis wonderful how it thrives now.

When Jane and I parted, there in the lane, I asked where she was going. She did not know. Would she send me news of her whereabouts, when she was settled? She shook her head: there was no more settling anywhere for her. But at least she might write to me, I urged. For a while she gave no answer, but there was denial in her face; and though her word was 'I'll not say no,' I have long given up hope of ever hearing from her again.

★

As he spoke thus the conclusion of his story, we rose and by a common impulse moved in the direction of Susan Bannier's grave; and there, in memory of the other woman, I plucked a few sprays from the end bush of lavender.

'How old would she be now?' I inquired.

'Not much more than seventy,' answered my companion.

'Then – possibly?'

'Ah, no!' he answered, 'let us hope not: let us, indeed, hope not! In sixty years she had been through enough to break many a strong back; and it was strength of will, more than strength of body that had kept her going. When I saw her last there was no will left in her to live. I pray God that that poor soul now lies where peace is, her controversy with God ended; for in life, I fear, she will never have found it. Forgiveness is better than forgetting, we are told; and 'tis easily said. But with some, to forgive themselves for what they have done is as much out of their power as to forget. Jane Waldron, being of a noble nature, could neither forgive herself nor forget, till she lay as Susan Bannier here lies.'

II

Blind Man's Buff

Every one in Chadsey knew that old Peter Booth was a man of narrow ways. Those who worked for him did not give him a good name; all the little differences of one who means to beat you at a bargain from one who means to deal fairly by you came out pretty soon if you had to do with old Peter. But beyond reckoning him a hard man of business folk thought no more of it; though there was some talk when his daughter, Sarah, chose to go out into service in preference to staying at home as she might well have done, for the old man had a small bit of copyhold, and freehold as well, and was reckoned to have saved something by the time he had got past work.

When his wife died every one thought his daughter would come home to look after him. But no, she did not; and Peter lived on with an old body coming in every day to do for him, and going back to her own home again at night. That, no doubt, got him into lonely habits; he became very unsociable, never inviting a neighbour inside his door. With his wife's death – hers being the last life by which it was held – the land fell in to the owner; but Peter had insured himself against the event, and from that time was in receipt of certain quarterly payments, how much or how little they were no one knew. When he put down the pony-cart it was understood to be merely because of failing sight. But when the woman who did for him got past work, and no one else came to take her place, people did begin to think it strange. And then, on the top of that, it was told that he was really going blind; and one day his daughter Sarah came back to look after him.

She was almost in middle age then, and had given up a good situation as housekeeper in order to be with him. A capable managing sort of woman was Sarah, and eminently respectable; but it was not to be looked for, under the circumstances, that there should be any great affection between father and daughter. Duty was what had brought her, and her duty she meant to do; but she found that old Peter had got ways of his own, by then, which no managing could disturb.

She had only been with him half a year when he went quite blind. People were sorry enough for him, but they seemed even a bit more sorry for Sarah: nobody thought old Peter would be a very easy person to live with.

What I tell you now only came to be known bit by bit afterwards; but I tell it in the order of its happening. We go inside the house, so to speak, so as to get Sarah's own view of affairs, and understand her course of action, which led at last to the whole thing becoming known.

She had not been with her father long before she noticed plainly enough that there was a difficulty over money. She was surprised at the small amount which she received week by week for the housekeeping; and though she was a born manager she found it hard enough to make ends meet. When his sight completely failed, she thought, no doubt, that she would have the entire handling of his affairs; but no, – once a quarter he made her take him down into Banbridge to his banker's; and there he would enter the manager's room alone, and come out again with the annuity-money in his pocket. Sarah never knew the amount.

It so happened, however, at one quarter-day, that old Peter was laid up in bed, too stiff with rheumatism to

move out. When the day arrived he became very fidgety and restless, and at last it seemed that he could wait no more. Sarah, indeed, was bothering him for the weekly allowance, and by his own account he had not got it to give her. So finally he dictated a letter to the Bank asking for a sealed bag remittance to be made by bearer. He signed the letter, which Sarah herself carried to the Bank, and, being known, the money was handed to her without question. When she received it she was considerably surprised at its bulk, and having already her suspicions, she felt through the thickness of the canvas and counted no fewer than fifty coins of various sizes; while by their weight she knew that a large proportion must be in gold. This opened her eyes considerably.

When she got home she was astonished to find the old man out of bed and downstairs. Evidently he was waiting for her. He took the bag, and without opening, weighed it in his hand, saying, 'Ah, so they've sent it in silver!'

Now that she knew was not true; but she said nothing. Old Peter, still without opening the bag, gave her some money – which he must therefore have had by him all the time – and told her to go out at once to her shopping.

Sarah accordingly set out; but seeing that she had the average curiosity of her sex, I need not tell you she did not go far. She went in fact no further than the garden-gate, and after a clatter at the latch, stole back toward the window of the room she had just quitted. There she saw old Peter in the act of turning back from the window; it was evident he had been listening for her departure. Then he sat down and began to undo the bag containing the money. He had just broken the seal and was about to pour

out the contents (and you may think how Sarah then sharpened her eyes) when a thought seemed to occur to him: he got up, felt his way across to the window once more, and let down the blind.

Sarah was mightily put out, as well she might be, by this unexpected rebuff; but though deprived of the ocular proof she had anticipated, her mental vision grew keen. In spite of what old Peter had said to put her off, she saw gold, – and a good deal more of it, now she came to think matters over, than lay in that particular bag.

Being of a philosophic turn, she went off and performed her errands. When she returned she found the old man in his accustomed place, quiet as ever, and the window-blind up again. She stared round the room pretty hard, but said nothing, nor did she see anything to give indication as to where the money had been stowed.

That night it was a long time before she could get the old man up to bed again ; but he went at last. When she came down from seeing him comfortably settled, she had a regular turn-out in the hopes of finding where the hoard lay; not that she had any thought then of appropriating it to herself, but she had a natural housekeeping dislike to anything being about, with herself in ignorance of its whereabouts. Some day the old man might suddenly die; and then there would be a bother to find it! She wanted also to know how much he had managed to save – a natural curiosity; but on that occasion not to be satisfied. She sat down and thought the matter out. One practical result of her cogitations was that she let down the window-blind, and cut in it a good comfortable round hole at a height easy for looking through. Then she bided her time, trusting to fortune.

She had not to wait long; with wits now well awake she watched the old man as a cat watches a mouse.

The very next evening, just as it grew dusk, he sent her off, according to a custom of which she now recognized the significance, to buy him his half-ounce of snuff. This trick of laying in stock by small driblets had always been a worry to her; now it was explained. So, also, was his waiting until the time when the blinds would be safely drawn against in-lookers.

On this occasion his daughter got up to do his bidding with more hearty goodwill than usual; and according to his habit old Peter followed her to the door to lock it against intruders during her absence: a performance which also acquired now a fresh meaning. Sarah went down to the gate, opened it, clicked it, and straightway creeping back again took up her post outside the window, and set her eye to the hole in the blind.

In the opposite wall was an old disused window, blocked up perhaps in days when windows were taxed, or walled in when some lean-to, now no longer existing, had been added to the cottage. In any case the window, both glass and framework, remained intact, with merely a white-washed wall at the back of it.

To this window Sarah now saw her father feeling his way, and knew all in a flash, the whereabouts of the hoard.

She saw him first fumble with the hasp, then open the casement, then on the stoop make a long arm, which fetched up a couple of bags. With these he advanced to the table, and she recognized the smaller of them as the one she had herself brought from the Bank the day before. He set them on the board, opened first one then the other, and poured out the contents.

In one heap apart lay something like a hundred and fifty gold sovereigns; in the other gold and silver lay mixed. The old man pushed forward an arm, feeling slowly and cautiously to make sure that the two heaps lay well divided: then he began counting the smaller one. Sarah noticed that he made mistakes now and then, putting sovereigns along with shillings and shillings with sovereigns: she saw him weighing and feeling to make sure which was which, often apparently in doubt. She would have been surprised at his finding so much difficulty in judging by weight alone, but for a sort of palsy which, coming with old age, had affected his sense of things ponderal; nor are hands that have been used for outdoor labour so sensitively informed by contact alone as yours may be or mine. Still it was apparent that old Peter had by dint of effort been able to sort his gold from his silver and so keep it, making a hoard of the one and leaving the other for current expenses.

Fixing her scrutiny on the smaller pile, Sarah was able to make a fairly close estimate of the amount she had brought home: she reckoned it at twenty pounds, two pounds in silver, the rest in gold. That would mean that her father had eighty pounds a year to live on; but the amount which actually came to her for housekeeping was something much nearer to the quarterly allowance than to the whole. What she did not receive evidently went into the reserve fund; for as she watched she saw old Peter take twelve pounds from the last remittance and transfer it to what might be termed his deposit account of accumulated savings.

Sarah Booth had, till that moment, attended on her father without calculation of future advantage; she had,

indeed, made a sacrifice, for she knew that his annuity died with him and that only the small freehold cottage and garden would remain to her. She had come to look after him from a sense of family pride and decency, rather from affection; but having every right to feel that she had been a dutiful daughter, her sense of justice was revolted that she should have lost a good situation and comfortable living in order to aid and abet this old miser in dragging out a life of sham penury, – that all her management, and economy, and hard scrubbings and diggings, had been practised to no end but to allow him to hoard up a little more gold, in which his blind eyes could no longer take delight, and for which in his old age he could have no prospective use. Undoubtedly, as she looked through her eye-hole in the blind and watched those miserly hands pawing over the gold, Sarah felt aggrieved, and inclined to let her resentment have play. But there was something of the sporting instinct also in her mood: she had found old Peter out, had spotted him down, taken his exact measure; and he – did not know.

This gave her a sense of power, of possession. The discovery that her father was not so dependent on her as he had pretended, gave independence to her also. The question was – how should she use it? Of course she could go back, declare all she knew, and insist that if she stayed to look after him he should consent to live according to his means. But it was just possible that he might reject her terms; and Sarah, feeling defrauded, and having eyed the glitter of so large a heap of gold, was minded to stay and see that it was well spent – that no accident happened to it. And so in the end, determined to risk nothing, instead of breaking in and dropping thunderbolts on the old man,

as she might have done, she let the matter stand and went about her business, leaving him still scrabbling over his gold-heap.

When she returned, having been gone hardly longer than usual, she found Peter sitting under the mask of his affliction just as she had left him, a patient, resigned, almost reverend figure of blind age. But from that day the game of hide-and-seek began; and with it there came to Sarah a growing sense of power, a power which became the more sweet to her in that she let no sign of it escape.

It was her secret; presently it became her mastering passion. Hitherto she had led a life of dull respectability, a dependent, holding petty authority without initiative; life had not struck her before as specially interesting; nor had it occurred to her that humanity was an object worth studying. But now it was revealed to her, this life, this humanity, in a new and a romantic aspect, – a thing to discover, to pry into, to gloat over and experiment on. She was a woman unlikely now to marry or have children; yet she had that hard domestic instinct which makes good nurses, mothers, and housewives out of unlovable and tyrannical characters. This possessive sense had never before found full scope; household management for her father had given her but little satisfaction, since he had not eyes to see how by hard labour she had impressed her individuality on her surroundings. Now, however, she exulted in the means of ascendancy secured to her by his infirmity. He had practised concealment and evasion, keeping secret what she had every right to know; it seemed, therefore, fair enough to pay herself back out of his own coin.

At the first safe opportunity, Sarah did not neglect to

make a strict investigation of the money-bags. She found in the larger one rather more than she had expected, not far short of two hundred pounds, and this made up entirely of sovereigns. In the other bag were sovereigns, half-sovereigns, and silver; these coins had been separated, the gold from the silver, and tied up in opposite corners of a silk handkerchief.

Now, in a spirit of mischief or experiment, it occurred to Sarah to substitute among the gold a sixpence for a half-sovereign. Tying up the handkerchief again she put it back into the smaller of the two bags, restored both to their hiding-place, and waited for results.

It so happened that the very next market-day gave her the demonstration she had wanted. Old Peter, in handing over the usual weekly money, told her, as was his custom when the coin happened to be gold, to be careful and not lose it. Sarah was delighted. 'Lor! Father,' said she, 'whatever are you thinking of? This is only a sixpence you've given me!'

To make the matter certain she gave it him back. Peter was greatly perturbed; and Sarah sat down opposite to him and smiled, quite pleased with herself. Her father handled the coin suspiciously and uneasily, shifted about in his chair, got up and sat down again, unable to keep still. All this Sarah watched with a comprehending eye; it was evident that he wanted to get her out of the house. But if he gave her nothing how was she to make her purchases, and if he surrendered the impugned coin, which according to her was only sixpence, how was he afterwards to dispute it?

Sarah was quite phlegmatic over the business: whatever course he decided on, she had made her point. In the end

he kept the sixpence, and raking out of his pocket a couple of shillings said that was all he could afford; ten shillings being gone somewhere, she must make it go as far as she could.

She went off submissively enough, and before long was round at the window watching. Sure enough, old Peter was out with his money-bags; and to watch him, she told herself, was as good as a play. He brightened up wonderfully when by dint of much testing he recovered the missing half-sovereign from among the silver – for up to that time Sarah had taken nothing actually away, though she had begun to have out the money-bags and open them for her own amusement after she had got him to bed.

So, when she came back from market, she found him all right again, but saying nothing. Thus the fiction of a lost ten shillings was kept up, and the housekeeping purse stinted for a week in consequence.

The incident perhaps helped to remove any strong scruple that Sarah might up till then have retained. Anyway, from that date she began more definitely to scheme against old Peter's miserliness, and to wonder how, comfortably and without suspicion, above all without spoiling her game, she might get things more into her own hands.

Matters were now at this pass: the old man, since his desire to be ever handling his gold increased as time went on, was always waiting for his daughter's back to be turned; and she was for ever giving him the opportunity he sought. And as the delight of secret watching grew strong in her, so gradually did a love of the gold itself worm its way into her heart. She wanted to possess. It was unreasonable, she knew; for she had only to wait till the

old man was in bed to possess it just as much as he did; it was as safe in his keeping as in hers. But she could not forget that he had deceived her and was unfairly stinting her – that she worked harder than was necessary, and lived with him on a poorer scale than he had any right to expect; nor can you play the game of cat and mouse continually without the predatory instinct obtaining some hold.

The next quarter-day was drawing near, and Sarah, who had hoped that her father might again be unable to attend at the Bank, had the disappointment of seeing him keep in his usual health and strength, though both were of a failing character. But being well resolved now to follow out her purpose, she made preparation to suit the circumstances. So in company when the day came they visited the Bank, and as they returned, old Peter carried the money-bag safe in his own pocket.

Now Sarah knew quite well that nothing would induce him to open it in her presence, but that immediately on their return he would make some excuse for getting her out of the house. So, as she was about to make the tea, Sarah, in taking the kettle off the fire, let it slip through her hand, tilt, and spill.

Old Peter was informed by a lusty scream that his daughter had got her foot scalded. She made a great to-do with it, bandaged her shoe up in rags and walked lame. After that there was no getting rid of her.

The old man fussed and fumed, inventing wants of this, that, or the other – things she might perhaps be able to get for him from a neighbour: but their nearest neighbour was a quarter of a mile away, the cottage standing lonely in its own lane; and Sarah declared that she could hobble no

farther than the washhouse and back again. This she did giving him just time to slip his bag away into its hiding-place. After that her foot began to get better: and when old Peter suggested that she should get to bed early and lie up with it, leaving him to follow when so inclined, she declared she had too many things to see to, and shouldn't think of bed much before eleven.

Old Peter tried to sit her out, but it was no good: when she saw that was his game she opened the door and let the fire out, in order to chill him up to bed. Then to quicken him she declared that they would both go, and by that at last got him upstairs.

No sooner did she hear him get into bed than down she came again, for she had a fine scheme all ready waiting to be put into execution. She got out the bag that he had brought home that day, and emptied out its contents: the amount was twenty pounds; eighteen pounds in gold, two pounds in silver. To replace these, Sarah put in from a store, with which by a draft on the secret parent source, she had provided herself – eighteen shillings, ten florins and eight half-crowns, coins easy for the fingers to reckon with.

It was a simple piece of artifice, and yet ingenious when you come to think of it, since it left nothing with which the shillings need be set in comparison. Old Peter was so certain the bag contained twenty pounds that only by misreckoning could he come to think otherwise. Sarah was still playing the game with some caution: it was a sporting venture. She put back – repaid, that is to say – three pounds of what she had now taken into the large bag of sovereigns – making the total there just what it should be, and pocketed the rest.

Scarcely had she done this than she fancied she heard a creak upon the stairs. In another moment there could be no doubt of it: old Peter had got up from his bed and was coming back again.

'The old cheat!' thought Sarah to herself, 'why, he must have got into bed with his clothes on!'

She had only just time to get the bags back into hiding when her father's hand fell upon the door-handle without. In her trepidation she blew out the light. This of course made no difference so far as old Peter was concerned, darkness and light being all one to him except when the latter was close before his eyes – but it made the situation rather trying for Sarah. She had to trust to her ears alone to guess what went on, and to keep out of reach of the blind man as he moved about the room. She backed into a corner, held her breath, and waited.

Evidently old Peter was nervous, afraid of being overheard; twice he went back to the door and listened; dead silence convinced him at last that his daughter had not been disturbed. He came on again, unhasped the little window that Sarah had so lately shut, and got out his money-bags.

She heard their muffled chink as he carried them across the room, the soft rattle of the coins as they slipped out on the table, and then – 'tink-a-tink' – the slow counting over of them began.

To Sarah's ears the light chink of the pieces as they fell one upon the other was unmistakably silvery; but as the old man muttered through his arithmetic in undisturbed tones, she began presently to breath more freely. It was evident that he suspected nothing.

How strange, if you come to think about it, was this

obsession of an old blind man! His blindness had caused him to give up tobacco and take to snuff instead, but it had not made him lose the joy of handling the yellow metal whose colour he could no longer see, whose sound even, now that he was dull of hearing, he could no longer with any certainty distinguish, whose weight his trembling old hands could no longer properly appreciate. And yet the love of his gold was stronger in him than it had ever been, and was becoming each day more furtive and more passionate. Sarah had seen him spread out the pile of sovereigns and bury his face in them, take them up one by one, and lay them against the lids of his blind eyes, as one lays coins on the lids of a corpse to give to dead eyes the appearance of rest; and watching this miserable exhibition of base human folly, Sarah's heart had felt neither the shrinkings of disgust nor the meltings of pity: it had become infected, corrupted, and debased, till the covetous desire of gold had grown in her also, along with that other desire, which perhaps can run to more cruel extremes still, – the desire to have mastery over another soul.

But she had not yet probed all the mysteries of the poor human heart. Presently as she listened, she was startled to hear sobbing and a dull metallic note as though the money lying upon the table was being softly pushed about under the pressure of face or palm. 'Oh, I am so poor, so very poor!' quavered the old voice in a depth of maudlin self-pity, indescribably forlorn. And again and again came the cry faintly uttered – 'I am so poor, so poor!'

Then there was silence. The room was very cold; gradually light stole into it. The late moon had risen; before long its radiance fell upon the blind. Through the

hole she had cut in it came a small disk of clearer light; it lay upon the wall near her like a large white coin slipping by degrees to ground. Presently something intervened: the disk disappearing from the wall, alighted on the old man's shoulder as he sat at the table bowed over the gold. Sarah, who believed in death-ticks and all such portents, wondered superstitiously if this betokened death; but a movement reassured her.

In the obscurity she saw the old man rise from his recumbent posture, gather up his hoard, and carry it back to its hiding-place; then, having hasped up the window, feel his way cautiously back to the door by which he had entered. Straining her ears she heard him ascend the stair and re-enter his room. She then relighted her candle and made a practical investigation to assure herself of the success of her strategy. Finding that twelve shillings had been transferred to the larger of the two bags, she smiled satisfied, put the hoard back into its hiding, and after waiting a safe time stole softly up to bed.

Sarah had now found out that to old Peter's dulled perception shillings and pounds were very much alike, and the certain knowledge of this made the temptation too strong to withstand. Little by little, lest too sudden a change in the weight of the bags should attract his attention, she took over the gold into her own keeping, and before long had by substitution left her father nothing but silver.

She may have held that the ruse did him no wrong: it deprived him of no pleasure or benefit that was otherwise his, while it left her free to add as seemed fit to the comforts of the house. Old Peter ought surely to have thought his daughter a wonderful manager, for Sarah having the

gold secure in her own hands was not so purely the miser as not to expend a portion in satisfying her housewifely pride which had so long been stinted of means; in fact, she was not miserly in the true sense at all; she was naturally a saving woman, but it was rather graspingness than hoarding that was her passion, and she cared very much for the look of things, and to stand well in the envy of her neighbours. Old Peter did not guess how smart bit by bit things were becoming all about him.

Meanwhile, the double secrecy of their relations to each other went on. Sarah had now become more bold in her methods: what she loved best was to sit in the room with him unbeknownst, to see him handle so cherishingly the silver she had given him in exchange for gold, to watch each movement he made and every expression of his face.

In order to secure this gratification she started a pretence to go across to one of her neighbours a little before her father's bed-time, leaving him to find his way up to bed alone. As this gave him a fresh opportunity of paying a visit to his hoard, he raised no objection and consented to be locked up in the house during her absence, since he would be in bed before she returned.

Sarah would take the key from the inside of the lock, open the front door, shut it again, put in the key and turn it, pull it out once more, slip it into her pocket, and creep back to the room where her father was sitting. Under cover of the stir he made in opening the blank window and reaching after his money-bags she found no difficulty in getting back to her carefully arranged vantage-ground. Then, with only the table between them, she would sit and watch him, and now and again would reach out very cautiously and substitute a shilling for a pound

among the outlying coins while he was engaged in counting up his piles of tens; and doing it, she felt with a keen sense of satisfaction how the reins of power were really passing from his hands into hers. Power – that was what she loved.

Before long she had gone further still. Led on by his helplessness into experiment, and feeling her way with fresh tests of the dullness of his wits, she would remove a coin here and there from some pile, making the total come wrong, would withhold it until she had driven him to count over and over again, each time more perplexed and desperate, and finally would restore it and let the reckoning come right. A cruel trick, but habit sweetened it to her, for she felt indeed then that she had him body and mind in her own keeping: also it made deception safer, the old man was beginning to be unsure of himself, and would count many times over, even when the results came right. That surely was a strange game for anyone to have looked on at, played across the table, week in, week out, by the blind old man and the middle-aged woman with the hard face and the cold beady brown eyes.

During this time old Peter kept his health fairly well, – not that he went out much; but he was able when quarter-day came round to go down as usual to the Bank.

Most of the Banbridge folk knew what his periodical comings to the town meant and 'There goes old Peter Booth to get his screw!' was a likely enough remark to be heard in the market-place, when the blind man went by, his daughter leading him. Perhaps it was said on this last occasion of all.

This time Sarah was not concerned as to how he received his money; all went like clockwork under her arrange-

ments, and she had but to take her own time to get things her own way. Nevertheless on this occasion, as on the last, perhaps from the sense it gave her of power over that haggard brain, perhaps without intentional malice, Sarah stayed in the house on their return, and would not stir out again.

On Saturday night there was always more to do in preparation for Sunday; unexpectedly, before she was ready for him, old Peter announced that he was going to bed. That meant that the Bank money-bag was going upstairs with him: it meant, therefore, that when the house was quiet, he meant to return.

Sarah went in to have a look at him about half an hour later, declaring herself then on her road to bed. A glance round the room told her where his clothes were: he had them on under the sheets. She retired, saying nothing.

Downstairs again, she fixed up a candle, in an old horn lantern, sufficient to throw a dim light on the scene, and placed it upon a high bureau not too near the door. She took this precaution because at times her father had sufficient visual sense to be aware of a light near and on a level with his eyes. Having thus made ready she took up her position and awaited his coming with confidence.

It was about twenty minutes before she heard him feeling his way downstairs. As soon as he had entered all went as usual: with one money-bag drawn from its hiding-place and the other from his pocket, he sat down to the table, and was speedily engrossed in business.

It must be remembered how the situation now stood: the only gold remaining in the old man's possession was what he had brought from the Bank that day: all the rest – the coins occupying the larger bag – were the now more

than two hundred substituted shillings. As old Peter spread out his riches into two heaps, Sarah, according to what was now her established custom, began exchanging shillings for pounds.

By some chance – either her sleeve touched it, or he did – a sovereign slipped off the table and fell to the floor. Old Peter, hearing it go, went down on hands and knees and began to grope for it. When at last he had found it he knew by its size that it was either a shilling or a pound, but he was not sure which. To solve the matter he took up a coin from the heap of should-be sovereigns, and laid it face to face with the other. In another moment he arrived suddenly at the disconcerting discovery that the doubtful coin was a little bit smaller than the one which he reckoned as a pound.

Sarah, fully alive to the fact that his suspicions were now awake, or were on their way to becoming so, saw that her only safety lay in depriving him at once of all means of comparison. The moment he laid down the questioned coin in a place by itself and raked for another, wherewith to make further comparison, she saw how his mind was working. Quick as thought she reached over, took up the pound he had for a moment laid down, and substituted a shilling.

Peter, having found that the two supposed pounds he had in hand corresponded, that all in fact from that heap did so correspond, now started with considerable agitation to try comparison once more with the coin he had just laid down.

This time, of course, its size matched; he was more puzzled than ever.

Sarah, meanwhile, was subtracting one by one every gold

piece from the smaller heap and substituting shillings. The game was exciting; she held her breath for long periods fearing to make a sound: the slightest slip might at any moment betray her.

A man with his suspicions awake is much more acute than a man without: old Peter had begun to wake up. With violently trembling hands but quick as a bird picking up its food, he began to catch up coin after coin for purposes of comparison. He was more than ever at sea.

Then he began to count over the last quarter's payment which still lay apart from the rest. Sarah, in her hurry, had not set matters there quite right. At the end of his addition the old man was hopelessly out; he fell into despair.

And now Sarah saw him in greater agitation than ever taking up batches of tens and twenties and weighing them in his two palms the one against the other. She leaned forward over the board staring and breathless, hands out and clenched like a rower's waiting the word to start.

The old man muttered and whined. All at once he threw up his arms in a sudden access of despair. 'Oh, God!' he cried, 'Oh, God, I am going mad! Why can't I see? Oh for one moment, just for one moment give me back my sight; or how shall I ever know?'

Sarah had been holding her breath so long that now, as she let it go, it issued in a faint sigh. Old Peter sprang suddenly to his feet. 'Who's there?' he cried, sharp as a pistol crack, and crouched with hands out guarding his treasure.

Sarah had risen at the same time, cool and self-possessed, still hoping to ward off discovery. Lest he should reach out and touch her, she drew back and stood rigid, strung to her last muscle.

'Who are you?' cried old Peter again. 'Some one is there: you have been robbing me! Where is all my gold? how much have you taken? Ah, I'm blind, I'm blind! Sarah, Sarah, come down! They are robbing me!'

As he thus cried aloud, he began in frantic haste to clutch up all the money he could lay hold of and tumble it back into its bag. In a wonderfully short time he had cleared the board. Thus bulked it became an effective weapon in the hands of a man, even though old and feeble, nerved to desperate defence of his property. He reared it up with a formidable gesture.

Sarah saw him about to advance: she was in a corner with only one way for escape, the table was between them. She was hoping even now that persistent silence on her part would make him believe he was mistaken. Then it struck her that if he came nearer he might discover the light that stood behind her on the bureau. Across the back of a chair a shawl lay handy: catching it up she threw it over the lantern completely muffling it.

As she did so, as the natural gloom of the midnight hour asserted itself, the window became the most illumined point in the room; and there, against the blind, and against the eye-hole that she herself had made she saw in the semi-obscurity of the moonlit night the shadow of a man, – the motionless shadow of one watching.

Terror and dismay seized her: she uttered a low cry, and stood self-betrayed. In another moment the blind man had sprung upon her, lifting up his bag to strike. She struggled to get past him, and unable to do so shrank back, crying aloud, 'Don't, don't, Father! It's me, Sarah!'

The suddenly revealed truth seemed but to add to his

terror and rage. All at once a stunning blow from a dull metallic weight, that chinked as it descended, fell on her, striking her out of her senses to earth.

What happened afterwards could never accurately be known.

When Sarah came to herself again all was dark and silent. A gust of cold air told that the outer door stood open; search proved that she alone remained in the house. Old Peter and his money-bags were gone.

During the remainder of the night she waited, expecting that he would return, wondering perhaps how much she would be obliged to admit if accused. But when it began to grow light a new fear impelled her into action. It would never do for the story to get abroad; possibly her father had gone to seek shelter and protection under some neighbour's roof. It was necessary, therefore, for her to go and bring him home.

Her head was still dizzy from the blow she had received, but she dared not wait; she ran up the lane in the direction of the nearest group of cottages.

The event proved that she need not have hurried. She came on the old man lying by the side of the way, with pallid face upturned, quite dead. His throat bore marks of rough handling, his clothes also gave signs that a struggle had taken place: the money-bag, which his dead hands still crooked to clutch, was gone.

That, afterwards, was traced; and the man in whose possession it was found did not attempt, in the face of his graver danger, to deny the charge of robbery and violence of which he stood accused. But no murder could be proved against him; failure of the heart's action was the medical verdict when the coroner held his court.

There the incriminated man elected to give evidence, and, having been duly cautioned, gave it.

Truly, he had a tale to tell of what had gone on under his eye as he watched at the window-blind.

Sarah, too, entered the witness-box and bowed her head to the judgment passed on her by the world. She never lifted it again. And though she gave old Peter a funeral that all the world turned out to see, and in due course raised a costly marble emblem over his remains, she never righted herself in men's eyes.

She sold the cottage: and with the proceeds of the sale and what remained of her ill-gotten gold passed out of the district. Chadsey heard of her no more.

III

The Defence of Farvingdon

Clara Jane's mother was the caretaker, though the care taken was indeed nominal. The occupation of two rooms on the basement, and the receipt of custom from such parties as came now and then to be shown over, did not prevent the great house overhead from falling to disreputable decay.

Outside, the five stories of red brick, with their Cybelean crown of cornices and gables girt about by an ascending density of ivy, seemed firm enough to continue for centuries; but within, the old place was eating its heart out at neglect. Windows had become broken to the weather, or, thrown open one summer's day, had remained so for the winters after, till their rusting hinges, letting them tilt more and more outwards, held them suspended for their final drop out of existence. Tiles that had loosed their hold on the ladder-like rafters, blocking the gutters or rattling off into the moat below, had left openings in the roof; so that in course of time, under these extemporized skylights, decay had descended from floor to floor, bringing down the rubble and plaster breakage of the attics into the guest-chambers and once lordly reception rooms of the lower stories.

Swallows built their round-bottomed mud-huts above the white-sprinkled floors, and birds of whatever feather came and picked away plaster in their search for spring material. Now and then caretaking itself lent a hand to these and the atmospheric influences. When heavy snows blocked up the way from the outside world, and coal-cellar and thermometer together got low, the untrodden floors of corner

garrets seemed a superfluity to the guardian eye of their custodian. Moreover, at all times, after studied absence on the owner's part had made the scruples of the tenant's less necessitous moments appear plainly as self-robbery, the wattled partitions, thrusting skeleton ribs through the falling plaster, cried out and prevailed for conversion into firewood.

Thus the old house had been perishing of an internal disease for which no remedies were provided, though its outward seeming remained fair. Curiously set in a blank of fields, hollowing just perceptibly on all sides, it hid its face, even its chimneys, from the surrounding country. A mile of lane, one of those narrow twisting kinds whose hedges in early summer bear evidence to the stripping of hay-wagons, ended in a 'foredraft' at the little colony of five cottages and a chapel, that still stood for vassalage to the ancient hall. A four-barred gate marked the spot where once a more stately boundary had been. Within, stretched and dipped a large green field. The old way leading to the house was gone, and a cart-track went at a wide curve regardless of what was still of central importance to the eye, making for a gate and other fields beyond. A footpath, barely worn by the two pairs of inhabiting feet and the sparsely arriving visitors, now formed the only apparent connection, through its green isolation, of the old hall with its attendant group of cottages.

Within the gate, to one's left on entering, stood the chapel, in a narrow graveyard containing some twenty tombs, the headstones of a few generations; behind it, a priest's house – for the small place, true to its statelier times, was Catholic – lay in a high bowery garden, its old walls shut in by yet older trees.

Sloping softly away for two hundred yards, the grass ran over a shallow bank into the weeds of a stagnant moat. A low stone bridge led over it to the main entrance, now closed in by hoardings paintless with age. Above, rose walls of untimbered brickwork, and ivy, with an ascension of small, thick-mullioned windows to a cluster of gables five stories from the ground, and a bell-cot over all.

There was little beauty about the place on first sight; yet it had a physiognomy, impressive when you came to know it. Its immediate treelessness, its majesty, a majesty of height rather than of adornment, gave to it an air of rigid self-centred independence, whose first effect might be to hold hearts aloof. But once to see it, the warmth of its surface made mellow in strong sunlight, was to understand how much it had merely steeled its face against a long reversal of fortune.

One part told more plainly than the rest by what degrees of service it had passed out of rank into seventh age and nothingness. Wooden shutters and a crane hung, denoting that the east wing had at one time fulfilled the purpose of a granary. But even that employment had been taken from it; and now, when its serviceableness for any lower office was denied, the mark of its degradation cruelly remained.

At the back of all, across what may once have been a paved court but was now a mere scratching-place for hens, lay a large outbuilding. This also showed by its architecture that altering circumstances had changed its use: now a broken-down barn, it had once been the chapel of the Manor of Farvingdon, until de-consecrated on the interdiction of the Mass. The owners then, having sufficient proprietorship to prevent it being further desecrated in their eyes by the introduction of Reformation

practices, had made doubly sure by adapting it to the requirements of the property. A voided niche, and the butt of a cross still standing on the eastward gable, gave one side of its history, as clearly as did perforated brick-work and large wagon-doors the other.

Coincident with the change that had then befallen, the Manor of Farvingdon had become a centre for the smuggling of pious contrabands. Stories still abound in the locality of how the 'wings' of Jesuit cassocks fluttered bat-like along its corridors, of cupboardings heroically borne, and coffinings under narrow stair-lids. Remains were sufficient to show that the house had once been a veritable warren of secret passages; and Clara Jane's mother was wont to disclose to the dull curiosity of visitors the unearthed mouth of many a burrow that in past time had received black-gowned fugitives into its keeping.

In those days a retired oratory among the attics had kept witness to the faith. The present chapel, standing with the priest's house at the entrance of the field, declared by its dimensions how much former things had passed away. Left as a legacy to the faithful few still resident on the estate when the great house finally became vacant, it made no reckoning for any future increase to the faith in those parts. Its capacity was for seating thirty, for overflowing at fifty; and the priest, whom a quarter of a century's vegetable existence had rooted to the spot, had seldom seen its capacity seriously tested, and certainly could not record an overflow.

So past found touch with present through an atmosphere of decay; things, and a name, were here waiting for burial, never to rise again. And had this record to be of

place alone, its interest would be for the antiquarian rather than for the general.

But Clara Jane's name has already indicated that here she is the person of importance. The shadow of the great house had fallen across her earliest years; it may even be said that its shadow was in her blood. Whether the shapes of outward things falling upon the brain mould a resemblance in the flesh or no, it is certain that characters respond often and deeply to their surroundings. There are other spirits which, seeming to mould only on themselves, are like quicksilver, that breaks sooner than conform to an impression. Clara Jane's mind, on the contrary, had received to a fantastic degree the impression of her gaunt surroundings.

Across the banqueting-hall, a low irregular chamber filling the greater part of one floor, ran a broad oak beam. From it some hand friendly to the child had hung two ropes, knotted to a board at their lower extremities. Here, one of many mornings, Clara Jane might be seen trailing a languid leg to and fro through the dust and rubbish that covered the floor, timing her reverie to the diminishing oscillations of the swing. The walls all round her were bare; the once splendid oak panelling had been torn away and sold to defray the gaming debts of the then owner, for the absent family had a way at times of remembering that Farvingdon was still theirs. But that was before Clara Jane's day: she had never seen the old oak that had been one of the wonders of the county. The great staircase still remained, a square carved structure of massive design, whose four main supports ran to the entire height of five stories. One thing of splendour also was spared to the banqueting-hall – its ancient chimney-piece and

canopy of carved stone. Upon the hearth stood an old spit, appearing to modern eyes as some instrument of torture, and suggestive of having been brought to the spot in old days for immediate use on the bodies of trapped Jesuits.

In and out of the door straggled the russet and speckled poultry from the yard below. The way was always open, and not hard to find up one flight of stairs; and so it had grown to be a daily usage with them to come and pick up lime among the rubbish that strewed the boards. Their heads worked up and down in slow pill-taking jerks to the accompaniment of appropriate noises.

Clara Jane's body swung to and fro through their midst. After a spell of rest the energy of her motions had increased; she described a deep arc of a circle in the air; yet there was no abandonment in her play. All at once from mid-flight her two feet were let down; and she jerked out of her seat with a stamp that shot up a cloud of dust and made the hens' backs give way in momentary panic.

Quickly, as though her mind were possessed of a well-determined purpose, she went out, down the stairs, through the wicket in the boarded-up archway, across the bridge and green stretch of sunlit field, in the direction of the chapel.

The door from the porch stood open; there was a faint sound from within, like the 'slop-slop' of a whitewasher's brush. Father Gornan was 'fresco-painting.'

No one was so proud of this achievement of his old age as was Clara Jane, except it were Father Gornan himself. It all came out of accident: damp had penetrated the wall at the west end of the chapel, and, spreading, had gradually

resolved itself into a patch suggestive, in some sort, of form. One day, regarding it with an eye of concern, the Father said to himself, 'If that were only painted now, it would look like an archangel.' At last, grasping the courage of his opinion, from a body of whitewash coloured to taste, after three days' strenuous travail, he caused the likeness of an archangel to appear. Clara Jane lent eyes to the eloquence of his self-applause; thereafter a harmless ambition softened his brain, and the colouring spots spread like measles through the sacred edifice.

Ever since, the Last Judgment had been dawning by degrees, going from the west eastwards. Half-way up the north wall Clara Jane found the reverend Father, promoted upon a plank over a couple of barrels, plying a gesticulatory arm. Sunshine played in lattice-work upon the whitewash-splashed floor.

Clara Jane came quietly behind and began stirring a bucket containing the cream-coloured flesh of angels. Presently the priest looked down, preparatory to taking a fresh dip. 'You, child?' he said in peaceable accents.

She looked up till she felt she had his mind in her leading; then she moved her face up and down three times, slowly and emphatically, conjuring remembrance to his brain. Previous commissions dawned on his recollection. He let his brush fall, from sudden dismay, into the wrong bucket, where it sent blue veins radiating over a cream-coloured surface.

'Not again? not still?' he exclaimed, coaxing her to reassure him by a negative.

Clara Jane nodded asseveration. The poor Father crossed himself, muttering a prayer, and the next day a Mass was said in the chapel for the repose of certain

souls whose family ghosts were reputed still to walk the weather-beaten passages of Farvingdon.

This was an event which had become periodical from about the time when Clara Jane arrived at precocious years of discretion.

The honour of the house was dismally gone by many ways past reach of recall; but in some way people were still to be reminded of a sort of feudal claim to which recognition must be accorded.

It was Clara Jane's way.

Clara Jane had a garden planted in an angle at the back of the house, among the roots of a great ivy. Overhead, without a single ledge to arrest the eye, rose like buttresses the flanks of two chimneys: an arch joined them above, knitting itself with the parapet; while higher still, unrocked in its cot, lay the big bell, hanging an ominous tongue over the depth below.

It was the most striking point of view architecturally that Farvingdon could afford, to stand below and look up and up at that silent threatening shape, dark against the sky. Perhaps it was through a sense of protection in what seemed a menace to others, that Clara Jane had perversely chosen for her garden a spot where few flowers could thrive. A soil carefully enriched from without, and a jealous watchfulness against the scratchy acquisitiveness of hens, gave to its growths at times a semblance of health and vigour. But Clara Jane had ways, as well as times and seasons; and Nature had not devised the flower that could thrive continuously under her love. Her tending hands at times dealt out contradictions to any existence whatsoever. This appeared from the outset, but a short time after the

garden had first been planted. One day, corporal punishment befalling her, whether for offences small or great matters not, there appeared forthwith in the doorway a thing whose raging brain sought only for vengeance, a fiend whose hands, digging and plunging for prey in the loose soil of her own patch, discharged in alternate volleys uptorn roots and handfuls of earth, till all the ground behind her was strewn with wreck, and her back covered with streaming pellets of mould.

The disappearance that immediately followed, her mother had learned by experience to tolerate. When Clara Jane had assuaged her passion by hours spent among the rusty cobwebs and dry litter of secret passages whose ways only she dared fathom, there emerged at dusk an object white, exhausted, and passive, rendered obedient to the least word by a prolonged weariness of body and spirit.

The once was typical of many occasions; and the next day she would tearlessly gather up the strewn remnants of her garden, and replant them with remorseful and painstaking solicitude. If they consented to live once more under her hands, it was well; but if they died, her heart hardened itself strictly against all vegetable creation; and for weeks her garden would be left to endure undeepening, because absolute, neglect.

Soon the easily-forgetting hens would encroach and scratch over an enlarged border, and, believing the embargo to be broken, find relish in dismembering the withered stalks and roots that lay around. Then came crack of doom: vengeance again appeared; and Clara Jane, selecting a victim, pursued it ruthlessly, till it yielded up its exhausted and breathless body into her hands. After that

she punished it with what she fondly believed were mental terrors, the infliction of bodily suffering being alien to her instincts; while, war with one tribe causing truce to the other, she forthwith became once again an assiduous tiller of the soil.

After some such outburst as this, a small penitent would creep into Father Gornan's confessional, and lay bare the harrowing fact that she had been cruel to her flowers by neglecting and letting them die. But the vengeful pursuit of terrified poultry, and the wrath which had been the root of the whole evil, had no place in her category of sins.

Clara Jane's mother had often a puzzled mind about her; it could not but strike her as strange that a child, in whom an affinity might be expected to declare itself, should seem at times possessed of a passionate hatred for the place in which she had been bred.

Twelve years ago, when the present baronet had come into responsible office through the death of his father, the post of caretaker at Farvingdon had been found or made vacant; and the mother, with her daughter then an infant, had come a stranger to the neighbourhood and taken possession.

In the earlier years of her training Clara Jane had been drawn into fascinated companionship with the old priest, to hear his stories of the family, and the house with its wonderful hiding-places, and of the sacred vessels that had been hidden during the days of persecution, and were supposed to be still in some deep place of concealment within the thickness of the walls. But, as time went on, her manner of hearing of these things had changed: she ceased to ask questions, and showed no corresponding interest when the

subject of past family history was broached. She had once in her mother's hearing, when visitors had come to be shown over the house, called it a 'dirty old place'; and had then and after proved herself an incompetent conductress and a bad recipient of fees.

She was even malignant; had she not again and again heard her mother answer the inevitable inquiry for ghosts in a circumstantial affirmative; and did she not know well enough with what evidence it was weighted? Yet of set purpose she had lied against all tradition when once called upon to answer the same question. It was the first time she had taken upon herself to act as guide in her mother's absence, after vainly endeavouring to persuade the intruders away. Ushering them, with emphatic refusal to linger, from room to room, she recounted in chill, chiding accents and monotonous delivery, the scraps of history her mother had taught her for the purpose. When the ghosts were inquired after, she let it appear in her face that a great liberty had been taken, and then withered all interests by replying in stilted formula: 'It is known that there are no such things as ghosts nowadays.' Under Clara Jane's generalship the interest of the place had become exhausted in ten minutes. The fee that rewarded her impolitic cold-blanketing was unsatisfactory to the maternal heart. 'You haven't no pride in the place, that you haven't; and there's proof!' she cried, calling the coppers to witness. And then it was that Clara Jane had blasphemed, describing the Manor of Farvingdon as a 'dirty old place.' But she took her scolding with resignation; having still in her mind the back-view of the disappointed party. She had watched their departure from an upper story; and as the drag that had brought them

turned away out of the field, she frowned, and out of a full heart her mouth spake: 'I hate them! I hate them! I hate them!' she whispered fiercely.

One day she said to Father Gornan as she watched him paint, 'Father, if the sacred vessels were to be found, where would they go to?'

The Father paused in his work. 'To the owners,' he said. 'Why?'

'Are they the family?'

'Yes, the family, of course.'

'Why isn't the Church the owner?'

'Well, you see, my child, it is so long since they were in use. And if tradition is true, they were very valuable.'

'Had they great big pieces of coloured glass stuck about them?' asked Clara Jane, as though studious to have them made plain to her vision.

'They were probably jewelled: that is what would make them valuable.'

'Then if the owners had them, they would sell them, just like they did the oak out of the big hall?'

'Perhaps,' answered the priest; 'probably. Even the Government might like to buy them.' He went on, after a pause: 'There's been many a hunt for them; and it would be worth anyone's while to find them. Suppose *you* set to work, little one, eh?'

Clara Jane's answer was so long in coming that the Father looked round. No one was there: she was gone, stolen from him unperceived.

'What an uncanny child it is,' he muttered to himself, and straightway relieved his feelings by a fresh attack on his beloved fresco.

One day the midday country postman put in an unwonted appearance while Clara Jane and her mother were sitting down to dinner. The latter opened the letter which he had brought, and read it slowly. When she had mastered its contents after a fashion, 'Well, well, really now!' she said, and laid it down.

'What is it, mother?' asked Clara Jane.

'Oh, it won't be no trouble to *you*, I'll warrant. We've got to clear out of this. To be sure, it'll be a change for you.'

Clara Jane's face became rigid: she put out her hand for the letter. 'Why are we to go, Mother?'

'Oh, I don't know. There's things going to be done here, it seems; it looks as if it meant the house was all to come down. Take it across to Father Gornan; he'll tell you what it means.'

Clara Jane got up on to her feet and walked slowly across to the priest's house. Father Gornan was not at home; she sat down in the trellised porch, and waited. The letter lay open in her hand; it was an agent's letter, beginning, 'I am instructed by Sir Cuthbert Reeve Farvingdon to inform you that on and after' – ; and then followed words only dimly construed by her intelligence as meaning that in a short time Farvingdon itself was to be no more.

The sun had left the tree-enclosed garden, and the porch was shadowy with dusk, when Father Gornan returned. As he entered, something showed round and white through the gloom, and he recognized the upturned face of Clara Jane. In her hand was the open letter; and an almost strange voice said, 'Please, Father, this letter has come for Mother; and will you tell me, please, what does it mean?'

The priest took it and held it before the fading light. 'Ah,

yes, yes,' he said slowly, when he had done reading it, 'I have already heard something about this. Well, child, it means the old place has to come down. Some contractor finds it will be worth his while to rout out all the old ceilings and panels, and take the great staircase, and the carved stone chimneys and the rest of it; and money being scarce in a certain quarter just now, he is going to have his way, and the thing will be done. And for fear, I suppose, lest the place should come tumbling down on the top of them, they are going to take it down bit by bit; and let the sunshine into all the old Jesuits' hiding-places. Perhaps they will find the lost treasure too; who knows? And you, little one, will go and live in some nice new home, where there will be no shadows to frighten the heart out of your body. You will be glad, won't you?'

'Yes,' said the child steadily, 'I shall be glad. But I don't think the treasure will ever be found.'

Before many weeks were out, the contractor's scaffolding poles began to arrive. Clara Jane's mother had been making arrangements for one of the neighbours to receive them and their few articles of furniture until the future should be more decided. Some small amount by way of a pension she understood she was still to receive.

Day by day signs of the change that was about to take place multiplied. The courtyard became crowded with implements of destruction; then a party of strange workmen came and took lodgings in the neighbourhood.

The day on which the caretaker's occupancy came definitely to an end, the day, that is, which was to be followed by the commencement of the work of demolition in real earnest, Clara Jane was absorbed, apparently indif-

ferent to all else around her, in the transplanting of all the flowers from her garden into that of Father Gornan. One by one she carried her loved ones across in a good shovelful of their own soil, and set them in the place of shelter the Father had accorded to them.

Men tramped up and down the stairs of the great house, and slung their coats over the carved balusters. Not since their entrance had Clara Jane once put foot on the stair, or shown any wish to pay a farewell visit to the scenes of her solitary childhood. It was as if the whole place had become dead to her from the moment when she had heard its doom spoken.

By the time that the men had knocked off work for the day, Clara Jane and her mother had carried off their last belongings, and had gone into temporary residence under a neighbour's roof.

The disturbance of a first settling in, and the arrangements in accommodation which had to be finished off at the end of a busy day, made the supper-hour somewhat late. When it was finished, and just before going to bed, Clara Jane declared that she must go over to the priest's house and water her newly-planted flowers, which she was sure would otherwise die in the night. She was stubborn on the point.

'How can the child see to water them in the dark?' asked the neighbour, when she had gone on her errand.

'I don't know,' said her mother; 'she's got eyes like a cat; I've often found that out.' And she proceeded to give instances of Clara Jane's perspicacity of vision, as evinced in the dark corridors of their late abode.

Before long, Clara Jane returned, and, without taking up the candle that had been placed for her, went upstairs to

bed. It was already late, and her mother and the rest of the household soon followed. In the country, poor folk turn in early and drop off quickly.

Mother and daughter were to sleep together in the same bed; Clara Jane had chosen the side facing the window. Soon there was deep breathing in the room, and nobody stirred; only Clara Jane was awake. She lay watching the opaque darkness with her ear uncovered, as though expecting some signal to declare itself to one of her straining senses.

At length a dull blister of light appeared through the blind; the monotony of the outer darkness was disturbed. A faint glow kindled the opposite wall, and died. Again, and this time it lingered, flagged, hung wavering, then swelled. Slowly the air became tinged and suffused with red. All at once a sound sprang up; it whispered, it crackled, deepened, loudened, opened, and became a roar. Its voice and the light that accompanied it were a signal that roused all. Sleep was torn up by the roots, cries mixed themselves in a scramble for clothes, and windows were thrown wide.

'Clara Jane! Clara Jane! the Hall's on fire!' screamed her mother as she bundled into her gown.

The child sat upright in bed, shivering horribly. 'Draw up the blind, Mother; let me see it.'

'There! get up quick and come along!' cried her mother, throwing back the blind. 'Oh! my gracious me! see there how it's a-light!' Three stories were already lined with fire: a great serpent, with crackling scales, writhing to be out. She fled down to join in the clamour below.

'It ain't no good,' said a man; 'buckets won't do nothing on that.'

'But can't they go to Chidderingster and fetch the fire-injins?'

'Fire-injins can't be got and fetched ten miles, and find anything left of this here,' said the common-sensible one who had before spoken.

'However did it come about?' was the question asked of all.

'Well, well, that ever I should live to see this!' remarked one, then repeated it with a growing sense of relish.

'It's those workmen leaving their pipe-ends about as done it, I'll be bound,' was the conviction of another; and after the first bewildered sense of alarm had settled down, phlegmatic comments passed from mouth to mouth

'Hasn't the old place woke up, just?' hazarded a local wag; and a dogged play upon the word greeted this sally, showing that it epitomized the general view.

'It's woke *us* up, anyhow!' came from another, capping the successful hit.

'It's woke them up too,' said a lad, pointing.

'Oh, the pore birds! the pore birds!' exclaimed a woman, as the onlookers discerned a tribe of swallows whirling desperately out of the flame and smoke, many of them only to fall back suffocated, or rendered victims by terror.

Clara Jane wriggled miserably and gasped.

'Hearken to that!' cried another, as, amid the ascending boom of conflagration, came two wild notes from the great bell. Its iron head rolled amid its crackling supports, then crashed clamouring, and was silent for ever.

Father Gornan had appeared upon the scene; all waited from him that expression of the general mind which was denied to their limited vocabulary.

'Has nothing been done?' he asked. 'How long ago was it discovered?'

"'Twas like to the Day of Judgment: it took us up sudden out of our beds, Father,' said a man.

'The old place looks fine now,' said the priest, after a while, watching the flames that lanced the roof with savage thrusts. There was a general consent at this new discovery.

'Yes, 'a looks fine, 'a do look fine; finer than 'a would 'a thought, knowing it like.'

Presently the roof dipped and went down; the flames, with a final crescendo, sent up a shaft whose points seemed to whip the sky. A child began to sob, fearing that the world was going to catch fire.

Clara Jane was the only being among old and young who had not gone out to see this great sight. The small crowd stood, huddled and half-dressed, warming itself by the blaze.

'There won't be much left there to pay for taking down,' said Father Gornan as the flames began to diminish; and a new point for interest and conjecture was started and went the round. The fire seemed to be having a grim joke against the baronet and the contractor.

The thickness of the outer walls, rendered stronger by their tegument of ivy, seemed to defy the power of the flames to bring about their overthrow. Within, by degrees the mighty wood-fire burned and beat itself low. As the splendour of the spectacle diminished, the crowd of watchers fell away. 'Well, well, to be sure!' said one and another, turning with equable mind to bed and the resumption of interrupted slumber.

Clara Jane's mother was not among the last to find sleep the superior attraction. Long after she had lain down and once more resigned herself to unconsciousness, the other

remained on the bedside watching the fire burn itself away, and listening to a still small voice that spoke words too solemn for exultaton.

Dawn came, and found her sitting there in sleepless grief. Then, before others were abroad, she got up and crept out of doors into the loneliness of a grey atmosphere, to visit the hot and blackened ruin of the house she had loved.

Her heart was stony to all the ravages of the fire, till she saw, floating on the cindered surface of the moat, some small dead bodies, swallows crumpled and singed by the heat; and here and there a bat, whose outstretched wings rested on the water like the broken sides of a canoe.

That day Father Gornan sat in his confessional to hear a small penitent accuse herself, in words of bitter reviling, of cruelty to certain of God's lesser creatures, and of betrayal on their persons of the sacred laws of hospitality. But of other things which weighed not on her conscience she confessed nothing.

So the contractor lost his 'plant,' and the head of the Farvingdons his bargain in the sale of the family oak; and against no one else was the loss charged.

Farvingdon still stands in maimed beauty, a tower-like ruin, unprofitable now for any commercial barter or exchange. New ivy springs up and winds it as the years go by; other swallows and bats build and hide in its walls; but Clara Jane comes not to look ever on the work her hands accomplished. The asperities of poverty have separated her from the locality of her romance; and it is the dream of a day yet to come in which she sees herself revisiting the place whose honour her pride indeed saved, yet, as the Scripture says, 'so as by fire.'

IV

Dan

Tawny evening light gleamed on the rain-washed platform and wooden ticket-shed which at a mile's remove gave Tunnock village its railway station. Along the westward track the red tail-light of the departing train shrank into circumferent gloom; around and above stood hills dark and stern.

The porter, who was also clerk and ticket-collector, having locked up the booking-shed, stood lighting the station lamp preparatory to departure, when a small voice of inquiry at his side told him that the solitary comer by the late 'local' had returned to the platform to seek guidance.

'Cart from Lydiate's?' queried the man reflectively. 'Aye, that come yesterday; but there was nobody for it then. Been getting yourself lost on the road, eh?'

'Oh, no!' answered the child. 'It was the wrong day. They must have made a mistake.' He paused, feeling deserted in a strange world; then he began to string questions anxiously. 'How far will it be? Can I walk there? May I leave my portmanteau?'

The porter relieved him of a large carpet-bag. 'Lydiate's?' said he. 'That's over five miles by road. Never been here before?'

The child shook his head.

'Well I reckon you can't go wrong if you keep on the way as I'll show 'ee. It's only to follow the road and turn up to the right after you've crossed the bridge.'

He led the way up a steep bank by wooden steps; then over two hundred yards of rising ground to where, on the turn of the ascent, the road passed through a rocky cleft.

Pointing across its declivity to a dull line of white walls and grey roofs lying under the ridge of the opposing hill, 'That's Lydiate's,' said he. 'Across the ford 'twould be only three miles; but the rain will have ris' the stream, I'm thinking, so you'd far best keep to the road.' Then after giving, not ill-naturedly, such further directions as he deemed necessary, the man turned to a separate course.

The child stood alone, attended in front and rear by a close and increasing solitude. Behind in its deep cutting gleamed the single lamp of the deserted railway station; before lay a new country, unfamiliar in type and feature, a country whose vast and stirless contours struck awe into a mind attuned from its earliest years to the narrow and noisy current of a London street.

On the height where he now stood the colours of the west still streamed warm, and the hour of shadowy terrors was not yet come; but in the valley below darkness already crouched waiting to spring, and it needed some bracing of the heart before he could find courage to advance with firm tread into that underworld of strange obscurity.

As he descended the confronting heights grew mountainous before him, and the gleam of the western heaven sank rapidly from view. Half-way down steep banks of wood rose up to meet him, and passing into their midst he heard on all sides the continuous dripping of soaked boughs like a sudden renewal of rain. Presently a sharp turn in the road which had hitherto led west gave an abrupt change to its character. In the place of wooded steep stood rifted rock,– precipitous walls through which, amid deepening gloom, the last stage of declivity was reached. Up this gully of darkness came a roar of waters; and across the far

end, netted by branch and leaf, shot the dark hurrying skeins of a hill-born torrent.

A few paces more gave him full view of the flooded stream. Here to his dismay – for high underwood concealed a leftward turn – he saw the road abruptly cut short, on this side descending to an impassable gulf, on the other emerging all shorn of face, a rough hill-track furrowed and overgrown, deeply dinted by the tread of ponderous feet. He shrank as though a trap had suddenly opened before him, for the unaccustomed noise of waters disturbed and shook his brain. Yet before long fear turned to fascination; he slackened speed, and stood to watch.

Suddenly from the thicket below came the sharp crackle of trampled brushwood; from the soft bank of earth a heavy stone parted and plunged streamward, and he saw amid stems shaken and divided two monstrous antennæ moving ominously towards him.

In another moment the apparition was explained: a man emerged bearing aloft a couple of fishing-rods. But the encounter was too sudden and unforeseen: the child quailed and turning started to run.

'Hey!' cried a great voice after him, 'where are you off to?'

Halting at a respectful distance he named his destination. 'Ho! – Lydiate's?' said the man. 'Why, then you must be Daffy! Come 'e here!'

Reassured at hearing his name spoken, the boy approached. Before him stood a figure of great height and apparent strength, whose garb of glimmering oilskins covered him from head to foot like the rind of a water-kelpie: only the face shone ruddy and warm. Even in that gloom the boy was aware that eyes of curious light and

sparkle looked at him. An instinct of blood warmed his heart to recognition. 'Is it Uncle Dan?' he asked, growing sure as he spoke.

'Yes, I'm Dan,' answered the other cheerily, taking kind hold of him. 'Why, you're a day late!'

'No,' said the boy, 'Mother's last letter must have missed. I came when I was to.'

'Well, you are here now at any rate: and I'm just in time to save your legs. You were for the road, eh? I'll show you better than that!'

He hoisted the child as he spoke to a shoulder slippery and cold, slipped a leg in the crook of each arm, and strode down into the flood.

Here, for Daffy, was adventure begun indeed! Against those great shoulder-blades his small heart beat quick, and his blood ran warm with delight as into the roar and rush of the stream they two together went down.

Passing out from the bank, his bearer nodded ahead, indicating a rough column of stone that rose from mid-stream. 'There's what one goes by,' he explained: 'so long as you keep above that you're safe: but it's deep water below.' Yet even so before they reached it there was hard wading to be done, and much wary footing over concealed boulders. Clearly such safety as could be claimed depended as much on knowledge as on strength of limb. Beyond the stone the going was comparatively easy, for from that point onward the water shallowed rapidly. As they drew clear Dan stamped down the moisture from his high leggings, crying with a short laugh, 'Eh, Daffy, but I'm thinking I ought to have dipped you! Folk say hereabouts that whoever gets dipped in the Tun at first crossing will never drown there afterwards. Some mothers bring their

weans here for a second christening; and there's fine squealing to be heard then! Will you go back and be dipped?'

The boy would have gone readily enough at the other's bidding. 'Ah, but you are too late now,' Dan went on. 'Once across it's no use going back. Take care of yourself, Daffy!'

Daffy looked at him with big eyes. 'Were you ever dipped, Uncle Dan?'

'I? Oh, I've been in it all my life. There isn't a fish in these waters over a year old, but knows me one way or another. You see – I belong.'

As they climbed the hill, Daffy was left with no breath for talking; when there was room for two to walk abreast he strode hard to keep pace, when forced to follow he trotted surreptitiously. At last they came to clear and comparatively level ground; and looking back across the valley he could see far away beneath him the rocky gap at which less than an hour ago he had stood solitary.

How much already the world was changed! Life had opened, the country had interests and habitations, and for safe companionship a good giant led him by the hand. Ahead the dull uneven line of white buildings began to loom large. 'Here we are!' said Uncle Dan, as he swung open a gate; and in another moment Daffy had set foot in the precincts of his ancestral home.

★

On a high level embraced by hills stands Lydiate's Farm, a long low building with rough-cast walls and grey slag roof. Bluntly faced by a cobbled yard, and beyond this by cart and cowshed, it presents no beauty to the eye. All is designed to forward by the readiest means the rough

wash and wear of the life which binds its occupants. House and barn share roof-tree together, a sure mark of yeoman origin, on which no subsequent generation has sought to impose change or disguise. But within these walls, lacking all outward comeliness, a strong home-loving race has bred according to its kind; and for its members, far dispersed in avocations little related to the soil, Lydiate's Farm has retained inalienably the name and the sense of home.

In the small heart of Daffy that implanted love for a hidden past awoke strongly to life in the very first days of sojourn among his father's kin. For the town-bred child the mere fact that the farm was so absolutely a farm endowed it with a beauty undiscoverable to eyes more familiar with its scenes. Every implement of labour, every form of life, every sound rising up from field and pen, every added round of the day's routine aroused new wonder and gave fresh meanings to the brain, and everything so viewed bore home with an almost emotional appeal on a mind suddenly awake. The bright paint of the wagons, the black grease oozing from the axles, the jingling brass of the harness, the heavy thud of hoofs where horses lay stabled, the sound and smell of munched fodder, the golden haze of sunlight over tossed straw, the trooping of turkeys to roost, the return of cattle from the field at milking time, all these things struck an arrowy delight into the child's heart, and left upon it impressions keen as the surprise which made those first encounters memorable.

With sense and mind thus occupied, Daffy gave little trouble to those around him, and but small account of the mild exploits and observations which filled his daylight hours. So long as he came clean to meals, and carried a

whole skin, the old mistress of Lydiate's scarcely questioned him, while Dan, for his part, was too fully occupied on the farm to pay him much attention. By degrees, as health took hold of a body that had long been sickly, the boy's heart rose to adventure. With 'Tory,' the great bull, access to whose enclosure had been forbidden him, he ran a desperate race,– won it at the cost of a leap through brambles and a noble tumble to a ditch of stinging-nettles; and made thereby the new and strange discovery that a pain well-taken gives a fresh pleasure to experience. Rolling among loose straw in the barn one day, he fell into a hole of horrible blackness, and there died many deaths – of suffocation, starvation, and hobgoblin terrors before he succeeded in hauling himself out again more scared than hurt. Yet even such terrors were dear to him; and while these were few his friendships grew many. The dogs who when on duty stayed not for caress, the pigs whose butter-milk he shared on churning days, even the horned sheep which fled at his approach, and eyed him from a distance, head erect and askance, quickened the comrade instincts of a heart lonely from the life of crowded streets. Towards all these he had a fondling desire for touch and better acquaintance.

Yet, when opportunity came, unfamiliarity sometimes bred a fear. In the hollow field behind the house he came one day on a cast sheep, legs in air unable to rise: and though he had seen the operation done by others he lacked the courage to put forth his own hand and give the necessary heft. After a time of foolish compassionate gazing, he sought aid from his uncle Dan, then busy mowing in an adjacent field. Dan gave him no praise for that errand, but with brief directions set him to prove what use was in him,

and, at succour accomplished, with a curt nod of approval strode back to his work.

Daffy accompanied him then with uplifted heart, and with the beginning of a hope that his uncle would hereafter take more note of him; for surely it was something to have lent a hand upon the farm. Striving to measure his own pace to the vast stride of his companion, he glanced shyly up to the grave weather-beaten face. The young man smiled kindly on him, then said:

'So you gave old Tory a run the other day, did you?'

The boy nodded and drew nearer with springing confidence, for here surely was a beginning of real friendship: Dan knew, it seemed; and yet he had not told!

'He didn't catch me!' said Daffy confidently.

Dan laughed him to scorn. 'Catch you? There'd have been none of you left if he had. What else have you been after, and missed catching? Fish?'

Daffy pondered for a while. 'Yesterday, up on the hill, I set fire to some gorse,' he confessed at last.

'Hey!' cried the other, with jovial sharpness. 'Don't you let Johnnie Kigarrow catch you at that! If he did, he'd mince you!'

'Who's he?' inquired Daffy, brave of tone but with heart a little perturbed.

Dan made no direct answer. 'Ye'll know soon enough who Johnnie Kigarrow is,' said he, 'if you go burning his gorse!' He sealed the saying with a grim nod, flung leg over gate, and strode back to his work.

Thus, for the first time, that great name was uttered between them, destined hereafter to form the thread of so curious a romance.

At that time Daffy had already been at the farm some

weeks, and was well acquainted with all the hands, for in those days of fifty years ago life at Lydiate's was conducted still on patriarchal lines: all the unmarried men slept under the same roof, and over their mugs of home-brewed ale, gathered each evening in one family circle around the kitchen fire. To the London child these great men, with the stain of earth and the reek of their field-labour strong upon them, seemed like a new race. Their heavy deliberate movements and slow unready speech made them unlike any he had met before; yet for all their uncouth ways they kept alive in their midst the eloquence of song; and night after night, when Daffy had passed to his small cubicle in the great bed-chamber on the ground floor, the last sound he heard would be the singing of the men, each voice, unguided by musical accompaniment, true to its proper part. Sometimes, at a later hour, for he was but a light sleeper,– he would hear from overhead the tremendous noise of their slumber: and so, maybe, it was unaccustomed quiet which, on a certain night, caused him to awake, and feel all about him the silence of an emptied house.

Rising softly he stole to the open window, heard sounds of labour abroad, and looking out saw in the field behind the house, under a sky that threatened change, haymakers turning the swathe by moonlight, and ghostly wagons hauling their load. The workers who were known to him had now been joined by women and youths, making a larger company at night than by day. Leisurely and dream-like seemed the motions of their toil; dull voices carried far on the night air; now and then a pitchfork gleamed in the upward toss of its load; the scrape of the rakes made a sound like the browsing of herds. Growing chill from exposure in only his night attire, the child returned to bed

but could not sleep. After a period of waiting, he got up once more and rather fearfully, lest he should arouse the grand-dame from her slumber, drew on his clothes and slipped forth to join the even-flowing life of the farm which seemed in its mysterious motions to know no pause. In the vague glimmer of night-mist and moon, he crept unseen along the hedge, came presently on a coat lying under a hay-cock, and, glad to have touch with that reminder of human warmth amid surroundings so strange, lay down upon it, and let his eye roam the field in search of its desire. Very soon he saw far out across the open one who worked coatless and plied his task with an energy unshown by the rest; and thus comfortably assured whose was the garment that wrapped him, he snuggled down in it, and lending to it the warmth of his own body was presently asleep. There, when the moon had set and dawn was showing grey, Daniel found him and carried him home. Not wishing to disturb his mother's rest, he bore him to the bed which he himself had no time to occupy: where three hours later the child woke solitary to the full light of day, and to hear, in a vague wonder at that strange transportation through time and space, the clatter of household preparations going on beneath him.

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Mystery quickened by the solitary workings of his mind was in Daffy's blood; wherever he sought he found it; and what in that direction his brain was once seized of, it never willingly let go. Thus you may be sure that he had not ceased to cogitate, since the day when he first heard it, that name of queer omen which Dan had carelessly employed to keep him from mischief. Hint and threat had sent him back with a whetted appetite to his hill-solitudes;

revisiting the charred track of his gorse-fires he spied eagerly for possible traces of a lurking enemy; and from thenceforward, as doubt and make-believe shaped to a likeness of conviction, the mere sight of a solitary figure advancing from a distance at quick pace was enough to send him scurrying for dear life with all the potentialities of an unknown danger following after. For better protection he sought to have his man described to him; and got from the farm-hands whom he questioned queer glances or vague generalities that told nothing. Now and then he was met by a blank denial of all knowledge, obviously lacking in sincerity. Daniel, when re-interrogated on the subject, put him off lightly: 'Ye'll never meet him, Daffy,' said he, 'till ye've walked all the way backwards from here to Tunnock-top with your eyes shut. And even that mayn't be all true, for I've never met with the man that has tried it!'

The feat was nearly as impossible as absurd; nevertheless at the next opportunity Daffy set himself to the task, hoping by guidance of a rough cart-track to make his way to the crown of the steadily-rising ridge. His attempt resulted in an inglorious tumble, followed by a long roll that brought him to in a dry ditch without serious injury. When he got up, there was his Uncle Dan watching him.

'Daffy,' he exclaimed, 'what in heaven and earth are ye doing with yourself?'

'Only what you said,' mumbled the boy, a little shame-faced at having been caught.

Silently Dan eyed him, with queer amazement springing in his glance. Then, throwing out an arm, he swung the small urchin to his shoulder. 'Oh, Daffy, are you daft?' he cried, and without more ado haled him homewards.

But Daffy stuck to his foolishness. 'I only wanted to know!' he persisted.

'Know!' cried Dan. 'Talk of it any longer, and I'll hang ye on a line over the Kigarrow stone till he comes up and pikes a meal of ye!'

Dan's words wrought no cure for Daffy; they gave indeed a new direction to his quest, for now the name Kigarrow stood fixed in a locality of its own: no sooner had he heard than instinct, on the memory of past hints, brought him to the fording stone below which Tun's shallows changed suddenly into deep water. Subsequent questions of old Carter John and others confirmed him. Yes, if he must know 'twas there that Johnny Kigarrow had gone down, riding under water on a great black horse with the sheriffs officers after him. Of his pursuers three had been drowned: but of Johnny Kigarrow's end no man lived who could tell the tale.

So piece by piece, from one and another, relics of a legend came to him. Hearing that part of it he remembered with a queer thrill how Dan himself rode a black horse; and with small childish wits vague as to time, he began to wonder whether that same great beast had not once been Kigarrow's own.

'Uncle Dan,' he inquired that night as they sat by the ingle, 'where did you get Blackbird from?'

'T'other side Tunnock,' answered Dan, 'not from these parts. When? – Before you were born that was.'

'Did you bring him?' interrogated the child.

Dan glanced across at his mother, and hushing his voice answered, 'Partly. You see we exchanged him. Old Blackbird was sent away, and a young one came in his place.'

'Why did old Blackbird go?' inquired Daffy.

Dan was uncommunicative. 'Oh, there were reasons,' said he shortly.

Clear and incisive from across the hearth came the voice of Mrs. Lydiate: 'Why don't you tell him the truth, Dan, and say that he killed your father?'

Among the farm-hands there was a sudden silence as that home tragedy was mentioned. Mrs. Lydiate spoke on:

'It's pride, Daffy: that has always been the way with us; and we've had to pay for it,– dearly. Dan's father rode a black horse,– always would, because his father had done it before him; and now Dan does it for the same reason. But I made him send old Blackbird away.'

She spoke composedly, for the deep grief of what happened eight years ago now lay calmed in the growing quietude of age.

A few days later Daffy had gone down to the pool to see old Wagoner John water his teams for the night. Presently, with a great neighing and clatter of hoofs, from the stableyard came Blackbird, fresh out of harness. As the great beast stooped to drink Daffy went forward and gave too rashly a soft pat to the glossy flank. There was a sudden twitch, a mighty plunge, and away into the pool went Blackbird splashing and snorting foam. The heavy cart-horses all round raised their heads in mild astonishment, and drew back from the muddied margin. Daffy had fallen. Old John ran forward cursing, and lifting the child saw a white face drawn with pain.

'What for did 'e go for to touch 'un?' he cried in angry lamentation, '– just when 'a was at the water! That was a fair crazy thing to do! But there! you come from Lunnon town, no more able to reason of things than a babe new-born!'

By half a span's breadth in the reach of that fierce hoof-stroke Daffy had missed killing. 'Don't tell Uncle Dan!' he entreated, when he could again fetch breath. But no promise was made; nor, indeed, was that possible. Old John carried him up to the house, where after violent sickness he was put to bed with hot possets and fomentations.

In the evening, when a delicious sense of release from pain was beginning to creep through his bruised members, Dan came and sat by his bed, laid a kindly hand on him, and mild in word and tone gave the measure of his reproof. 'Oh, Daffy, you be a fool'; he said, 'a dear little daft fool!' His next word gave news. 'There's the old Mother frightened of Blackbird now for good and all: wants me to send 'un away!' He spoke in moody tone.

'But you won't, Uncle Dan, will you?' cried Daffy aghast. 'It wasn't his fault, it was mine.'

'She makes no reckoning of that,' said Dan with sober gravity. 'You see, she remembers things.'

Daffy edged nearer, and whispered: 'I heard old John say that – SOME ONE must have been on him, else he'd never have gone off like that. D'you think it was HIM, Uncle Dan? – you know who I mean.'

The young farmer turned and looked at the child queerly. 'So John's been saying that, has he?' he commented at last. 'Look 'e here, Daffy, you've got that HIM of yours too much on the brain. Don't go talking to the mother about 'un: she hates to hear of folk believing in things like that: maybe because she believes in 'em a bit herself. But Johnny Kigarrow'll never do you any harm, Daffy; I promise you that.'

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Daffy was not, up to that time, so much in fear of the name as to need Dan's reassurance, for his terrors had been more artistic than real; but before long there came an influence which gave a darker shade to his credulity.

On release from sick-bed confinement the next day, he found an addition to the family circle,– one Maggie, already known to him by name, a stout rosy wench of fifteen years, standing towards Dan in the relationship of cousin once removed.

Since the death of her father, and her mother's second marriage, Lydiate's had become her adopted home; there, coming and going at will, she filled a position of privileged dependence, working or wasting her time according to mood, and presuming alike on Daniel's forbearance and Mrs. Lydiate's quiet tolerance. Strong and incorrigibly lazy, she alone of all that household displayed indifference to the old dame's authority. In her address of that lady as 'aunt' there was the evident omission of a generation: Daniel she called familiarly by his shortened name without prefix, although his mother when speaking of him to Maggie adhered to the more formal usage in a manner that implied correction.

For a while clannish instinct restrained the unfavourable feeling which Daffy experienced toward this new-comer on their first meeting; but before long he grew to hold her in active dislike, which she for her part did little to avert.

Maggie, it was clear, resented his presence; and he thought in a while to have discovered the reason on learning that the small partitioned space in his grandmother's chamber which he occupied at night had previously been hers. But by all showing in her relation to Mrs. Lydiate the bond of affection was small: if therefore the grudge

was on that score alone, it would hardly have assumed the warmth of a personal jealousy. Yet before long Daffy was acutely conscious of black looks and knitted brows directed towards him; and the point-blank question, 'When are you going home?' abruptly delivered before their acquaintance had lasted a week, gave him clear warning that between him and this new cousin no love was to be lost.

The girl's face and character told alike of conflict in the blood. She carried under bright eyes a mouth that sulked, and over her work made petulant movements that caused breakages,– a result which she seemed to regard with little disfavour: it was as though, resenting employment, she chose and liked to be careless. Towards Daniel she was possessive to the point of wishing to exclude all others. This showed early.

'Don't you talk to Dan so much,' she said, observing between the pair a growing intimacy.

'Why not?' inquired Daffy blankly.

'Because he doesn't like you,' she answered spitefully.

The child quailed, but rallied to rebut the charge. 'How do you know?' he cried stoutly.

'Because he told me,' said Maggie. 'You are always bothering him so: why can't you let him alone?'

At that direct information Daffy's brain shrank aghast, for along with his worship went great diffidence and awe. Sickliness of long standing had made him acutely sensitive to rebuff, and physical infirmity had left a mark upon his mind. For a few days the child withdrew from his devout customary attendance on Dan's daily rounds; instead he haunted the river, where on occasion, especially toward evening, Dan would go down to fish. Maggie, taking note of the manœuvre, returned to the charge.

'I wonder,' she said, coming on him one day by the river bank at dusk, 'I wonder you aren't afraid to be here alone: I suppose you don't know.'

Daffy inquired what cause there was for fear. Maggie's answer struck home.

'Johnnie Kigarrow comes here,' she said. 'How fast can you run?'

She had marked her quarry well; from that moment the feverishly working brain was in her power; and with a cunning air of reluctance she allowed him to drag the full story out of her: what he had hitherto gleaned in fragments he now heard more at length; and before she had done Maggie had brought the terrific presence of Johnnie Kigarrow down to date, and had given it a fixed hour and locality.

Relict of the feudal age, at a time of which local reckonings had long since lost count, Johnnie Kigarrow, a rebel for lost rights, had held and defended his hill-patrimony for many years against the strong arm of the law: and because his life had to be passed mostly in hiding had dealt out savage retribution on trespassers in the brief and hasty moments of his reappearance. So a whole countryside had learned to listen with dread for the stroke of galloping hoofs, advance-signal of one hard-pressed, but resolute and armed, riding for the forced levy of his dues. Sharp on refusal to that demand cattle had been houghed or driven violently to their death in flooded Tun; squatters' holdings had been burned both rick and roof, children carried away as hostages to ward off pursuit; and all this the native farm-folk had borne with a certain patience because of the old feudal loyalty which ran in their blood. Many a time had stricken homesteads afforded shelter and escape to the

destroyer of their peace; till at last on a night of darkness and storm, hemmed in upon three sides by the sheriff's bands, the great outlaw had ridden down into full roaring Tun, and there with a last shout of defiance had vanished from the eyes of men. In the place of his disappearance now stood the Kigarrow stone. How it had come there none knew: some maintained that his own hand had so planted it to block the path of the pursuing foe, others that the wrath of Heaven had thus marked his place of sepulture, and secured his turbulent body from again rising to vex the peace of his native hills. Nevertheless it was locally believed that his ghost still walked or rode.

'I've seen him,' asseverated Maggie, nodding darkly; and the drinking ear that heard her gave ready belief. 'Down by the ford,' she said, 'one night as I came home there was a man on a horse; right in the middle below the Kigarrow stone he was standing for all that the water there is so deep; and though it was dark his two eyes showed like lanterns in his face, and as they turned they made rings.' Maggie's voice gave to the picture its full terrors. From that sight, by her own account, she had run home to bed and an illness from which it had taken her weeks to recover.

'The less you go by the river the better,' she remarked for a finish, and so thought, no doubt, to bar off Daffy from further hauntings of his Uncle Dan's fishing-ground; but in this she had underrated the highly-strung, half-timorous courage of the boy's nature. Worshipping adventure, albeit with little love of sport, he now went to the river and watched the rising fish with greater frequency than before: and often at dusk, waiting for the chance coming of his Uncle Dan, seemed to see through the swaying foliage of wood-grown banks a man with light

eyes curiously watching him; then at a breath of wind among the leaves the vision would pass or shrink gradually away, amid the enlarging shadows of night. Nevertheless the sense of that presence still remained, laying a strange hold upon the lonely heart.

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The withdrawal from dear society which Maggie's words had imposed on Daffy had not lasted for long, before Dan had cause for becoming aware that something was amiss. One day he caught sight of Daffy furtively watching him, and after that a short observation was sufficient to show that the boy purposely avoided him; when hailed he showed the timid shyness of early days, and at Maggie's sudden call from the house, sprang away with a start of obedience unnaturally intense in so young a body.

However aloof in nature or in kind, Dan, in the last two years, had come into sufficient contact with Maggie to take – if so it pleased him – some measure of her ways. This at all events is certain: the next day confusion fell on her, and all her stealthy plottings went by the board. Dan looked up from the morning meal, cast an eye to the weather, gave a few directions to his men as to what things were to be done in his absence, and announced briefly that he and Daffy were off for a day's fishing.

The child sat dumb with astonishment, but Dan did not fail to note the instinctive direction of his glance. There came a sound of broken crockery. Maggie, standing by the hearth, had thrown down a dish of fried bacon, crying of burnt fingers. She stooped and with grumbling complaint began to fork up from the cinders the spoiled rashers and throw them back upon the fire. Watching them sizzle, 'Nasty stuff!' she said, 'I hate having to fry bacon!'

Dan ordered her sharply back to her place. There was mum silence: every one knew that Miss Maggie was in one of her tantrums.

Presently she broke out: if Dan wasn't going to work neither was she. It wasn't fair to put all the drudgery on her; she liked fishing as well as anyone, and knew more about it than Daffy did. 'If you don't take me too,' she declared finally, 'I won't lift a hand all day,– not to anything!'

Dan's answer was brief: as to that she might please herself; he and Daffy were going alone. He nodded the boy off to get ready as he spoke; and Daffy fled, glad to escape any further development of that scene. His mind was strangely divided between wild delight and fear; and when his preparations were finished he went out by the bedroom window, so as to avoid any fresh encounter of Maggie's wrathful eye.

Dan gave him some light rods to carry and an empty fishing-flail. 'Do you like coming, Daffy?' he inquired. The tone was kind, the glance friendly, half-mischievous, hinting an understanding where no word was said. Maggie was not named, but all in a moment the boy's recently implanted fear of Dan's dislike for him was scattered to the winds. Before long he had begun prattling once more with the easy confidence of that childish intimacy which Maggie had come to disturb, and only fell to silence in order to take with becoming gravity his first lesson in the piscatorial craft.

For three good hours, on the banks of a swiftly running water, Dan coached him with patience and care. Just at his first catch, as though by foresight, the guiding hand was removed, and Daffy performed the task alone. This

was on one of the upper reaches of Tun, sunk in a narrow glen of sylvan solitude. Overhead, as they worked upwards, the spaces of clear sky lost breadth and became few; where the stream narrowed over-arching boughs drew over from both sides, making at last an almost continuous network of green foliage; yet in the sun-flecked cavity below there still remained sufficient space for a deft cast of the fly. Daffy had a few mishaps,– broke a few lines: there was also some tree-climbing to be done, which, truth to own, he enjoyed quite as much as the fishing, albeit the cause stood for a bad mark against him. Presently Dan, seeing him incline toward new diversions, left him for a while to his devices, and disappeared on his own business upstream.

For a couple of hours the boy revelled in solitude, catching nothing, for, apart from the emulation of comradeship, his sporting instinct was not strong to last. But in his own way, at hide and seek with body and brain, he found plenty of occupation, till a twinge of healthy appetite caused him to cast about once more for his missing mate.

Though he had no doubt of lighting on him, by simply following an upward course, the quest led him far, quite far enough indeed to allow temporary indulgence in a luxurious pretence at being lost. 'Uncle Dan, Uncle Dan!' he called at intervals, and hearing the echo of his voice pass unanswered, became more consciously attuned to the utter solitude of his environment. It seemed with its long dank grasses, its high luxuriant ferns, and mossy stones a place scarcely ever trodden by the foot of man. Round about for miles lay bare hills and desolate 'tack' over which roamed, awaiting their time of probation, unbroken colts turned loose from neighbouring farms.

Once or twice he climbed the bank to gaze out over wider

solitude and to send from that vantage-ground a further call; for though sure that Daniel had not deserted him, his mind began anxiously to strain for a sign of his exact whereabouts; and the more it strained the more there grew upon him an oppressive feeling of solitude and of mystery.

Presently something which had lain upon his senses as a vague impression acquired distinctness. As he advanced he became aware of a growing quiver and vibration in the ground under his feet, accompanied by a dull sound muffled in distance, and guessed rightly that falling water was the cause. His ear took measure of its dimensions, and reckoned, not amiss, that a cascade of considerable height and volume was plying not far ahead of him.

Pushing eagerly forward for sight of so new a kind, he came presently, round a sharp bend of the valley, on a face of rock, down which in perpendicular lines of unbroken descent, fell two shafts of water, parted at their crest by a crag projecting thirty or forty feet above the eye from the rock's topmost verge.

Dark with moisture and shorn of growth the cliff's face caved as it descended; about its face sprang a drifting veil of spray; there, falling water and standing rock seemed alike,– the one in its blind waste, the other in its dumb endurance – far removed from all service or allegiance to man.

All at once, from the rocky cleft dividing the watery columns, there flew a delicate spark of light, falling in a wide curve it kissed the water, floated and returned. Again: but before it touched, the water's surface was broken: a lithe sinewy form, of silver and dusk leapt and fell again. Through the roar of the torrent came the sharp spin of the fishing-reel, and away downstream went a big bull-trout fleeing for its life. Then for the first time, gazing

breathless, Daffy had glimpse of that supreme reward of delirious suspense and mounting hope for which, though brief in its lasting, the fisherman bides long hours. Between roaring fall and shaken pool strewn over with dark boulders the swift play ran itself out on a single strand. To and fro shot the great fish, shuttle to the net of fate: – to and fro, up, across, and down.

'Back! Back!' cried Dan; for in his excitement the boy had sprung knee-deep into the stream and spread ridiculous arms to drive the tugging victim back to its last haul. But Dan needed no such aid; slowly on a great length of line, that alternately gave and drew in, the fish wore out its strength. Early in the contest Dan, garbed in glimmering skins, had emerged from his watery cave, and slipping deft as an otter between the double downpour that threatened destruction upon either hand, had followed with reckless speed, from boulder to bank, from whirling eddy to rocky pool, the intricate windings and swift dartings of his prey. But before long the strain of doubt and suspense was over; skill and the power of the rod had prevailed. The line spun slower and with longer rests for the up-winding that followed, till at last, from an upper corner of the pool confident word came down that all was ready for the final throw. For that finish Daffy was called to lend a hand, and as he plied the landing-net, Dan in a sudden exuberance of spirit broke into song. Strange words in a tune of strange intervals caught Daffy's ear:

'For here in the narrow,
And all up your marrow,
'Tis Johnnie Kigarrow
Has got you, my boy!'

The fish was landed – a bull-trout, six or seven pounds in weight.

'WHO did you say, Uncle Dan?' cried the boy, with startled interrogation, curious to know by what chance that name of mystery had found a way into verse.

'Who? What "who"?' inquired Dan, missing for a moment the point of the boy's question: then, with recollection, 'Oh, is it him you mean? Why, of course – that Johnnie Kigarrow of yours was a great fisherman in his day; and 'twas hereabout that he fished. Have you never heard tell of that?'

Daffy shook his head, and waited anxiously for more.

'Come on here with me,' said Dan: 'I'll show you a place.' Laying aside his rods he took the boy up under one arm, and with deep wading and a rough climb along slippery boulders, bore him in under the deep drench and noise of waters, to the dark rocky cavity which lay behind. 'This, folk'll tell you,' said he, 'was one of his hiding-places: and it's easily said when there's nothing to prove otherwise. But I reckon that at that time more water came down than now, and the place was harder to get at: but no doubt, if it was to be got at by anyone, he'd 'a' been the first.'

The cavern in which they stood was of no great depth, thick moisture dripped from its roof and sides, the air also was charged with it; through the two veils of water which curtained it across, a flickering light tinged faintly with green played over floor and walls, giving to the rocky contours upon which it fell a curious effect of fluctuant motion.

The boy drank deep of mystery and romance; and with his delight was mixed a certain fear, for the loud roaring

of the waters shook his nerves. Pressing close lips to his uncle's ear, he inquired, 'Did you ever hide here, Uncle Dan?'

The other laughed. 'Yes, I did that, when I was a lad,' he said: 'I'd quite a way of running from home once on a time; and often as not it was here I used to come. No one ever got from me where I'd been to, though more than once they beat me to make me tell.'

'Did you sleep here, Uncle Dan?' inquired Daffy awe-struck.

'Not I!' answered the other cheerily. 'At night I would go back home and sleep in one of the hay-lofts, take a pick out of the corn-bin, and then come back here for the day. The poor Mother, she prayed mortal hard over me in those days, thinking for sure that the Devil had got me. One night I came home when only she was awake – every one else abed; and I just outside could hear her still at her prayers,– using powerful words and loud, so as the Up-aboves might hear. Next morning they found me lying in my own bed; and Mother, vowing her prayers had done it, wouldn't have a finger laid on me. True enough the trick was hers: and that was the last time that ever I ran away. Ah, Daffy, I was a wild one when I was your age – and after as well; but I've a bit of the whipped pup in me still when the old Mother starts praying for me. Ah! if Johnnie Kigarrow had had her to do for him, he might have died in his bed.'

'Have you ever seen him?' inquired Daffy earnestly. 'Were his eyes like lanterns?'

'Well, no,' answered Dan, 'I can't rightly say that I have: but here 'ud be the place if all the tales about it are true. 'Tis here, they say, that his treasure used to lie, and here

he would come and bide long days and weeks when all the sheriff's men were out over the countryside looking for him. Back there is a niche broad enough for a man to lie down in; maybe you'd like to climb up to it: then you can make your boast that you've lain in Johnnie Kigarrow's bed.' Straight on the word Dan lifted him shoulder-high to the gloom of a dark niche which lay cut off from the cross-traffic of reflected lights that filled the rest of the cavern. The boy peeped into its dark recess, reached across it a groping hand but did not venture in. Turning to look back, he saw Dan's face dark against the veiled gleam of the outer world, and in the face two eyes of curious sparkle and light looking at him.

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This was the first of many expeditions: from that day, whenever after work-hours Dan went fishing, Daffy accompanied him. In the far-reaching twilight of summer evenings the two would carry their lines down to the river, part each on a separate course, and come together again for the homeward journey – the one with full basket, the other, for the most part empty-handed. When they thus strayed from each other's company the waterfall was often the place of final meeting, and there waiting for Dan's return Daffy would live over again the life of the old outlaw, run perilous races with sheriff's officers, and even dare to penetrate the barrier of falling water, and hug to his heart the dark security of its hidden recess For under Dan's tuition his fear of Johnnie Kigarrow had taken on more reasonable proportions. It may be that Dan, discovering into what extremes Maggie's teaching had led him, and finding the boy's fancy too deeply involved for an immediate cure, was trying homœopathic remedies.

There were at all events milder legends of the old free-booter than those which hitherto have been narrated, and many of these, in Dan's telling of them, made good stories: how, for instance, he had routed bailiffs from a poor man's dwelling, given generous relief where a crop had failed, and never been known to do harm to those small hostages whom high-handedly he now and then spirited away from home and kindred. The story went how one had been carried off a weakling and was sent back hale and strong, with strange tales to tell of how the great Johnnie Kigarrow stocked his larder and did his cooking. There was a humorous tale, too, of sheriff's officers coming up from a bathe in the river to find their clothing gone and to see it presently securely fastened to the horns and tails of wild cattle, from which episode had sprung a local proverb on the realization of unlikely events – 'When the Sheriff catches his breeches' – meaning that the time would not be yet. Before long this new Johnnie Kigarrow had become less a name to conjure with than a subject to spar over. It was Daffy now who professed the incredulity, and Dan who was the firm believer; and the more Daffy fought to disprove those quaint and belittling tales which reduced his mythic hero to comic rank, the more with circumstantial evidence Dan proved them to be true.

'Did ever ye hear tell, Daffy,' he inquired one day, 'how Johnnie Kigarrow went for a whole month with only one leg in his breeks, being so driven by the sheriffers that he never had time to give the other its dressing? And one day as he was getting over a stile the loose legging came off, and fell into the hands of the high sheriff himself. Years after it came into our family by marriage, and the old Mother keeps it rolled up in a drawer to this day.'

He made a rout among the old lady's hoardings and solemnly displayed the leg of an old trouser of peg-top shape with straps to go under the foot.

Daffy sniffed at it with contempt: it was too thin in the calf, Johnnie Kigarrow had never got into that: but Dan stuck to his guns: 'That,' he said, 'was what he wore after his calves had been shot away.'

Daffy took hold of his uncle's head and smote it against the ingle-back. 'Uncle Dan,' he cried, 'you are the biggest liar that I know!'

The summer wore itself out, ripe-complexioned autumn took its place. Dan would not hear of Daffy's departure. 'Before I let him go,' said he, 'I'm going to make him a true fisherman, and a farmer as well.' And there could be no doubt that under his tuition Daffy's education was proceeding apace. As for Maggie, it had become her custom when they were together to let them severely alone; but the child was still aware that her will to persecute him had not abated. One day she gave him, to carry to the table, a plate of food that had been keeping warm in the oven against Dan's return. He set it before his uncle, making no sign of the torture he had borne, but turning about with blistered fingers he met Maggie's eyes, and knew from that encounter that what had been done had been done deliberately.

Early in their river expeditions Dan had taught him to swim, a wise precaution where solitary pastime so often led him to a stream whose wadable waters ran suddenly from shallow to deep. It proved also a lucky one. Daffy could never afterwards be quite sure whether what happened was by intent or accident: one day as he and Maggie returned together from Tunnock village across

the stepping-stones, she from the rear, impatiently urging him to quicker pace, stumbled against him. Down he went souse into deepish water, and borne along by the swift-flowing current, did not again reach surface till he found himself in the dark eddying pool below the Kigarrow stone. Maggie was then wringing her hands, and screaming aloud for help; he shouted to reassure her, and immediately the screams stopped. When he rejoined her she was lavish in apology, though characteristically putting most of the blame upon him. She begged him not to tell; and even from Dan, to whom he now confided all his daily escapades, that episode, or at least the cause of it, was concealed. Another incident, though more vague of meaning, took in his mind a darker colour – all the more, perhaps, because it could not be explained, it caught and held his imagination. One evening, bent on a hunt for mushrooms, he went to Maggie for a basket; she asked where he was going to and straightway when informed, questioned whether in that direction he would find any.

'But I've seen them,' asseverated the boy.

'I know a better place than that,' said the other, 'a place where they grow in bushels only it's harder to get at.'

Daffy was not averse to the difficulty: Maggie, promising that he would be rewarded, gave him particular directions of a short cut across the tack to a neighbouring farm. Thus primed with his instructions, the boy set out. The way led over little Tunnock, a small foot-hill lying to the north of the larger eminence; on its further side there was an abrupt end to civilization, on all sides stretched land of an unreclaimed character, blotted here and there by heaps of slag and broken lime-kilns. Before long he grew doubtful of his course, and turning to take his bearings from

the rise over which he just passed, he saw standing upon it a solitary figure apparently watching him. The day was losing its light; he could not be sure that he recognized Maggie, yet he had an inward conviction of the watcher's identity. Instantly he lost all zest for the expedition, and after adventuring only a little farther turned and retraced his steps. The figure had then disappeared; he came back to the farm bringing no spoil: and when he set down the empty basket Maggie asked him no questions.

★

A few days later a letter came from Daffy's home suggesting an early date for his return. If, as report told, his health was now thoroughly re-established the object of his visit was achieved, and he must not stay to be anything of a hindrance during the busy time of harvest. Daffy sat mute, awaiting with good manners the decision of his elders. Dan suggested the extension of a fortnight; the end of the month, he said, would be time enough; then Daffy, who had seen the beginning, would also see the end of the harvesting. Mrs. Lydiate was quite willing to fall in with her son's wishes; so the matter was agreed.

'And you'll let me be useful, won't you?' said Daffy, conscious that Maggie's black looks were upon him, and seeking in that plea to justify this further postponement of his departure.

'Aye,' said Dan, 'we'll break your back for you, before we've done,– show you what work is. There'll be no more fishing after to-day till harvest is all over.'

That last fishing expedition was cut short, as far as the companionship was concerned. The fish that evening were slow to rise, and Dan, wise in his ways, knew that his best chance lay at a point some miles farther downstream.

Daffy was already looking tired, and though stoutly denying it, his uncle when they came to the Kigarrow stone forbade his coming farther.

Daffy did not dream of disobeying, but left to himself he lingered awhile by the stones, playing according to his habit in the company of his own fancies. Presently dear solitude was disturbed by the least welcome of all possible intrusions: Maggie appeared on the bank, bearing a large basket. 'You're to come with me,' she announced briefly.

'Who said?' returned Daffy, doubtful of her authority.

'Aunt wants me to go over to Landfair market and do shoppings, and I can't bring them all back by myself. You promised you'd make yourself useful.'

Her statement of facts sounded plausible, but Daffy still hesitated: 'I ought to ask Uncle Dan,' he said.

'He's not here,' said Maggie, 'and I can't wait: it's late enough as it is.'

'He told me to go home,' said the child.

'Well, I dare say he reckoned you would be wanted. Come on! I can't stay talking here all night.' And Daffy, casting a last wistful glance downstream, succumbed to her guidance.

Landfair lay three miles beyond Tunnock,– the only considerable township in the neighbourhood. It boasted a weekly market and an annual cattle fair; and it was to the demands of traffic between this place and the surrounding district that Tunnock bridge owned its existence. In all his long stay at Lydiate's Daffy had only been there twice, and its small country shops had not impressed him; their difference from those of the humbler streets around his own home not being sufficient to awaken interest. But what, in any case, would have been an uncongenial experience in

Maggie's company, that masterful young woman contrived to turn into an ordeal of the most penitential character. Transferring the basket to Daffy's hands while she shopped, she heaped it with parcels that made it before long a cruel burden for a frame so delicately strung; in addition to this she made her way at inconsiderate speed through slow crowds of shoppers, leaving Daffy with his large and heavy encumbrance to buffet a way through as best he might. When failing to follow he lost sight of her, she came back to administer before all the world, a minatory shaking accompanied by loud words of reproof. Having him in fact thoroughly in her power she made him feel it; and if a temper kept to the pitch of pretended exasperation for a long spell can bring pleasure to any human being, there is no doubt that Maggie thoroughly enjoyed herself.

Day's dusk had come before they quitted the town; Maggie, as an excuse for her conduct, had loaded her arms with parcels, large but light, while at her heels crept the exhausted Daffy still carrying the basket. The boy with masculine pride, born of recovered health, and raised by his new ideals of endurance to a code of honour, submitted to the mere physical hardship without complaint; but when Maggie, not content with material acts of oppression turned upon him the outrageous slings and arrows of her cherished hatred, paying back on him all her bitter grudge at his too long continuance at the farm, then Daffy's courage gave out, and flinging himself down upon the roadside bank he abandoned his heart to grief in passionate weeping.

Maggie waited till the first paroxysm had passed. 'What are you doing that for?' she inquired coldly. 'If you don't like hearing the truth, why don't you go away? Every one's

tired of you here; sick and tired they are, and you too blind to see it!'

'Oh, why, why do you hate me?' sobbed the boy: 'I've done nothing to you!'

'Hate you?' said Maggie, with a short gratified laugh. 'I don't hate you,– I despise you! You're only a worm, a little London worm, that wriggles and turns when it's looked at! Oh, no: one doesn't trouble to hate a worm; one only treads on it to make it go back into the ground it's come from. That's what I'm doing to you. When do you mean to go?'

'I'm not going,' said the boy, affirming his right with some recovery of spirit: 'Uncle Dan says I'm to stay.'

'Yes, you made him say that; you'd have cried if he hadn't! You coaxed him, you got him pity you; but he doesn't like you a bit. Don't think it!'

That shaft missed its aim; Daffy met it with a confident look more maddening to the jealous spirit than any word. 'You let Dan alone!' she cried in sudden fury, 'you let him alone, I say!'

The boy got upon his feet, white and quivering. 'I'm going home alone,' he said resolutely. 'I'll take the basket, but I won't be with you any more. I know why you hate me now: you wish I were dead; I can see it in your eyes.'

Maggie drew close, and fixing on him a curious gaze whispered, 'You can see it in my eyes, can you? Oh, well, see it as much as you like; but it's when you don't see it that it will come true!'

She gave a queer guttural grunt of satisfaction, and drew off again. 'It's when you think I'm not watching you,' she went on, 'that you'll have most cause to be afraid; and Dan won't be able to help you then, for Dan won't know!'

So saying, as though accepting that henceforth their homeward courses were to lie apart, she sat down on the bank, threw off her sunbonnet, and untying her hair started to re-arrange it. Daffy, without another word, took up the basket, and though staggered by its weight, set his face resolutely for home. Barely, however, had he gone a mile, when he heard quick footsteps behind, and looking round saw through the gloom his tormentor once more advancing towards him with a steadfast and curiously malignant air. For a moment gathering his spent energies for a last effort he broke into a jaded trot; but burdened as he was the attempt was quite useless; without running herself Maggie still gained on him; before long the distance that separated them was less than a dozen yards. Thus goaded, in a sudden fit of loathing and fear, the boy threw down the basket and ran. A wild ejaculation from Maggie told of spilled contents; the sound of pursuing feet told also that she had not stopped to gather them. Away the boy headed on a desperate race, seeking some gap through which he might leap and by that means make good his escape.

Along the road towards him loomed a figure, which, as it emerged from the uncertainty of dusk, took on a familiar shape. At that unbelievable stroke of good fortune, whatever was left of Daffy's fortitude gave way. 'Uncle Dan! Uncle Dan!' he cried, and threw himself weeping into his uncle's arms.

Maggie drew up abruptly and broke into accusation. 'He's thrown down the basket,' she said, 'and upset everything.'

'Serve you right!' said Dan brusquely. 'What call had you to take him with you at all?'

'I couldn't do it all by myself!' retorted Maggie snappishly.

'There was no need for you to do it; the cart was going in to-morrow; you knew that well enough.' Maggie stood mum; so without further words they retraced their steps to the scene of upset where basket and parcels lay strewn. On Daffy's attempt to resume charge of it Maggie snatched the basket viciously.

'No fear!' she said, 'I'm not going to trust you again!'

When one by one the parcels had all been restored to their place, except for a couple whose contents had been spilled beyond recovery, Daffy's rescuer stood for awhile considerately watching him; he was white with exhaustion, still trembling in the sharp reaction from his late fears. 'Come 'e here!' said Dan tenderly, and stooping, took the child on his back. Instantly Maggie gave a squeal, and dropped the basket. 'It's too heavy,' she cried, 'I'm not going to carry everything!'

Daffy reached down a hand: 'Give me the other parcels,' he said, 'I can carry them.'

'What? and I to carry the lot of you?' said Dan, laughing. 'No, no, Maggie, you do your own hauling! That basket is your own affair, and the other things too. If you didn't mean carrying 'em, you shouldn't have brought 'em.'

Maggie made a mouth, turned quick to the hedge-bank and sat down. Dan moved away quickly, disregarding her; when he reached the next bend of the road she shouted something after him – the words were indistinguishable.

'Naughty tempers,' commented Dan.

'I think I can walk,' said Daffy, ashamed that his weakness had brought Maggie into disgrace. 'So can she, when she likes,' remarked the other. 'I know her limbish ways!'

Daffy put his tired arms round Dan's neck, and heaved a breath. There was a word he wanted to say, but with the thought of speech he became shy. Laying his head on the shoulder that bore him he whispered it to his own heart, and repeated it many times till the springings of love were satisfied.

Arrived at the farm, Dan carried him straight to bed, and standing by while the child undressed, kept up a cheery run of diverting conversation. 'Oh, get in! get in!' he exclaimed, pretending impatience, when the boy stayed for the performance of his evening devotion. 'You can say 'em in bed for once. They won't count it against you this time!'

He came over and tucked him in; and as he so bent, the boy's heart broke out into demonstration of affection. Drawing down the face that shone upon him so friendly and kind, he kissed the bearded cheek, and with a voice trembling into tears, 'Oh, Uncle Dan!' he cried, 'I didn't mean to be a coward, I didn't indeed!'

With a face of hot indignation, Dan went out and spoke to his mother of Maggie and her ways. 'She wants a beating,' he said; 'and there's no one to give it her – the limb!'

Strong limb she was! Late that night Maggie had not come home, and Dan had perforce to go out and look for her. He found her, sure enough, lying just where he had left her, her clothes all damp with the dew. From the basket at her side she had eaten a hearty meal.

'So you've come at last, have you?' were the words which greeted him.

Before any discussion could arise she announced her terms,– if Dan would not carry the basket he would have

to carry her. Dan, without a word, took up the load, and making his own pace strode on ahead. Maggie trailed after.

Before long she had sidled up to him; 'I like you, Dan,' she said; and, on getting no response, added, 'What have you done with Daffy?'

Dan's continued silence only quickened her to the attack; over the three miles that lay between them and home, she plied all her arts. In a certain sense she failed; for from his sealed lips she wrung no sign, but finding that her words were to go unchecked she had her full say, and poured out in malignant volubility the jealous spite that had grown rank with keeping.

The next day, with brief announcement, she went off to stay with friends at a farm lying on the other side of Tunnock. Having started, she put her head in at the door again for a parting delivery: 'Good-bye, Daffy,' she cried. 'Mind you are gone before I come back!'

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Maggie's demonstrative hatred, so persistently displayed, left its bruising mark upon the boy's mind. Behind her back, while he avoided speaking, he thought of her all the more; and for the rest of that day went timid and subdued, still in doubt whether she might not return. But on the next, his heart, realizing its new freedom, soared and sang. Those that followed were days of bliss, destined to be treasured and singularly remembered during a whole lifetime after. Each evening as he and Dan returned to each other's company, the happy intimacy grew. As they sat and clacked by the fire, old Mrs. Lydiate looked on with smiling wonder; Dan was showing something of the child again; and curious it was to see how the new protective

relationship made him young. Often during that last fortnight of harvest, they met after a day's separation; and then Daffy had always his tales to tell. Loyal to Dan's leading in the part, he still went fishing, yet as often as not came home with nothing to show.

'Ah,' said Dan on one of these occasions, reviving the old controversy with mischief in his glance, 'Johnnie Kigarrow has got something against you. Have you been burning his gorse again?'

'It won't light!' confessed Daffy. 'It's wet.'

'Ah, but he sees you!'

'How could he see me?' demanded the boy. 'He wasn't there.'

'How not, when ye forgot to look for him round the big holly-bush where ye cut your finger – and lost your pocket-knife for a consequence?'

Dan chuckled wickedly, and Daffy's wits made a throw.

'Was it you,' he demanded, 'took my jacket and turned it inside out, pockets and all?'

'Did he do that?' inquired Dan with an air of shocked interest. 'Daffy, ye're making an enemy of the man! Have a care or he'll come by night and burn the house down; then me and the poor old Mother'll be found baked in our beds; and you he'll prick out of the fire like a chestnut, pull off your burnt skin and eat you in quarters! Ah, if you'd ever seen Johnnie Kigarrow, you'd not go playing tricks on him like that.'

'Have *you* ever seen him?' inquired Daffy incredulously.

'I can see him with my eyes shut,' said Dan, suiting the action to the word; and keeping them still closed he continued:

'Oh, the monster! – his inside is all raw red,– for it's the

inside of him I see now. And there are the three sheep Farmer Cruggan lost last week galloping round in his ribs; and down in the bottom of his guts there's that big pike I've broke my line over three times in the last year, and a lot of your mealy small fry as well! Daffy, he's been swimming under your lines and biting the fish off 'em, hooks and all.'

'No,' said Daffy. 'To-day I caught some, but I let them all go.'

'What?' shouted Dan, opening his eyes. 'And you call yourself a fisherman.'

'I don't,' said Daffy; 'I only do it to see if they'll bite.'

'Ye cold-blooded little inquisitor,' cried Dan, 'torturing your fellow-creatures for curiosity! I'm ashamed of ye!'

'It's as good as doing it for sport any day!' protested the other.

'And that it isn't!' cried Dan. 'Get off my knee, and down on your two own, and ask Johnnie Kigarrow to forgive you!'

'Why should I ask him?' inquired the boy, rallying to the game. 'He can't catch me.'

'Hasn't yet, ye mean!'

Daffy shrugged. 'I'd like to see him try!' he remarked boastfully.

'Ye wouldn't see him at all,' said Dan, flinging out an arm. 'He'd have you by the slack – so; and he'd up with you – so: and there,– first thing you'd see – would be his great round mouth all ready open to eat you!'

'I'll wait till I do!' said Daffy valiantly, making a clutch at Dan's beard.

But the other held him away. 'Wait? you'll wait, will you?' cried he. 'And while ye're waiting, what'll old

Johnnie be doing all the time? Who d'you think's got you now?' He leapt suddenly to his feet bearing the boy aloft.

'Not Johnnie Kigarrow, anyway!' retorted Daffy, excitedly struggling with his captor.

'And that's your mistake!' cried Dan, tightening his grip; and whirling the boy high in air and swinging him round, with a great shout of laughter his voice roared into song:

'For here in the narrow,
And all up your marrow,
It's Johnnie Kigarrow
Has got you, my boy!'

'Dan, Dan!' cried his mother, 'put him down! You'll be breaking his head against the beam.'

'And a good thing too!' retorted Dan, letting him softly down. 'I'll Johnnie Kigarrow him, if he talks to me!' Then changing his tone at sight of the boy's face, 'Hey? Hey?' he cried, 'Daffy, man,– what's the matter? Don't 'e be afraid: Johnnie Kigarrow's first catch is always a let go!'

But it seemed for a moment as though for that excited brain the game had gone too far, unlocking some secret springs of terror and emotions too passionate to be controlled. With a tremulous cry the child threw himself upon Dan's breast, and clung sobbing.

'There, there, little one!' cried his uncle, tenderly soothing him down. "Twas only a foolish bit of a game! To think of him taking it to heart like that!'

'No, no!' sobbed the child convulsively with hidden face. 'It wasn't you, Uncle Dan; I know it wasn't you!'

'What wasn't?'

'THAT! something I saw!'

'What could you see when your head was going all ways at once?'

'I did: it was Maggie! She stood at the window looking in. And I know,– oh, I know she means to kill me! It's seeing us together that she hates!'

Dan gave a sharp whistle, got up, and strode swiftly to the door. 'At her tricks again, is she?' he muttered as he went out. Presently he returned and sat down again, giving no answer to the inquiry of his mother's glance.

'So you thought I was Johnnie Kigarrow, did you?' said he, rubbing his hand kindly over the boy's head.

'No,' answered Daffy, recovering himself, but still shaken by his recent scare, 'I didn't quite think so.' After a pause he said solemnly: 'Are you?'

Dan laughed. 'Sometimes I almost think I am; for who knows what he was before he'd his own mind to go by. We can't answer for ourselves further than that, can we?'

'The first thing I ever remember, Daffy,' he went on with a reflective air, 'was coming up out of the water just by the Kigarrow stone, with somebody holding me by the heel; and there was the river all roaring round me yellow and green. Did you dip me, Mother, the first time you carried me across?'

Old Mrs. Lydiate shook her head. 'No,' she said, 'you fell in out of the cart, of your own wicked will, when your father and I weren't looking. I remember smacking you for it afterwards; and, well, you might have been drowned.'

The old lady folded composedly the hands which so long ago had done their duty by a headstrong son.

'The other day,' said Dan, 'I was fishing down by the ford,– just at the very place. The current was coming a

bit strong, so I put my back against the Kigarrow stone; and somehow all at once I felt it give a heave – a sort of a creep like as though something had shifted down below. That 'ud be Johnnie Kigarrow turning in his grave, I'm thinking – eh, Daffy? – and me walking over his head!'

'Who put the stone there, Uncle Dan?' inquired the boy.

'As to that,' answered the other, 'there's no real saying: if any one hand did it, that was Johnnie Kigarrow's, no doubt. Folk say a day will come when he'll be lifting it again,– either to get out or to get in; for there are two versions of him hereabouts. Some say he walks, others that he's gone under for awhile; but whichever way it be it's all but a question of time, and there's not a man in the place who'll come across there after dark: cart or no cart, whatever the hurry, they all come round by the road.'

'And you?'

'I? When I was a lad I used to go and stand there at night and play Johnnie Kigarrow as folk went by – frightened some of 'em finely, I did, too. Aye, if I'm not Johnnie Kigarrow myself – I've done him service!'

'Dan,' said his mother sadly, 'I believe you are a heathen at heart!'

'Yes, Mother; except on Sundays, I believe I am! For you can't drive horses without cursing 'em; and if Christian doctrine was law one should be able to do without that.'

'Your poor father, Dan, never cursed a horse in his life.'

'And so,' answered her son, ''twas by a fall from one that he died. Show me a horse as can throw me, after I'm once on him, and I'll let 'un chuck me to blazes for aught I care!'

'Daffy,' said his grandmother, 'you go to bed; and don't you forget to say your prayers. 'Dan,' (when the child was

gone) 'you ought to be ashamed of talking so, and him there listening to you!'

'Ah, Mother,' said her son, 'Daffy's beyond you and me for making or mending: he's a poor thing to look at, but he've a terrible great mind of his own,– full of things that the like of you and me can't understand – oh, a terrible mind!'

'And you've been frightening him out of it!'

'No fear! *Into* it, is what I say. That's the strange thing! When I had him in my hands just now, I couldn't 'a sworn whether the thing we played at wasn't true:– his doing that – not mine. Aye! under his childish ways he be grown far up beyond his years. Maggie wouldn't trouble to hate a mere child as she does him. Mother, don't you leave him and Maggie alone together too much; what he said to-night is true,– she wishes him dead.'

'Was it she at the window, just now?'

'Yes, she was there right enough. When she saw me get up she must have run sharp; but I found the tracks of her. Five miles did she come just to have her look and go again. There's nothing natural about that; and all her ways are of a piece.'

'She'll be in trouble one of these days,' said his mother significantly.

'Oh, she's right enough,' answered Dan carelessly, 'so long as you don't thwart her. She can look after herself.'

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Two days later a carter from the farm where Maggie was visiting brought word that she would return that evening, accompanied by small Sue, a cottager's child whom Maggie in one of her fits of tyrannical petting had taken up and turned into a plaything.

Daffy, according to previous arrangement, was to be gone on the morrow, and the news of his enemy's premature reappearance upon the scene turned to troubled foreboding the inevitable sadness of those parting hours. All through the morning and into the afternoon his spirit crept on broken wing; and with his own apprehensive mood Nature herself seemed in accord.

Harvest had ended in the nick of time. The farm-hands had scarcely dispersed to their different avocations after the midday meal when thunder rolled among the hills, and the sun which had shone but fitfully disappeared under a copperish lid of haze. Soon after, thick clouds mounted the horizon and overspread the whole sky. Under a leaden canopy edged with fire the air grew dark.

Restless in any company save one, Daffy sought out his uncle, and sat beside him in the great barn watching him make sheep hurdles, while Dan, absorbed in his task, said nothing except when spoken to.

The constant thickening and obscurity of the light became comparable before long to the closing-in of dusk; through the wide folding-doors, a broad glare yellow as clay – of an almost earthen quality – fell upon the strong man's form as he stooped over his work; above and behind him loomed the stirless shadows of the great barn.

Suddenly like a flap of pale wings in the gloom came a rasping flicker of light, making visible the corners and end walls of the vast windowless enclosure. As Dan looked up to its passing, imminent thunder crashed. He threw down his tools. 'We shall get it now,' said he; and even as he spoke, down came the first large drops of storm, which a few moments later changed to torrential downpour that tore for itself channels along the ground. Across

this charge of waters flashed instant lightnings; thunders followed in double peal.

Down the yard ran a farm-hand with a sack thrown over his head for covering; in fumbling haste he propped open a gate. Dan uttered an exclamation, and sprang to his feet. 'There's Tom,' said he, 'though I told 'un, forgotten to fetch in the horses. If Blackbird's out there, now, he'll never get hold of him. It'll take me all I know to do it myself.'

He cast an eye over the crumbling ridges of cloud, dark bodies with ashen edges raked across by beams of copperish light. 'We are going to get it hot this time, Daffy,' said he, speaking with a sort of relish. 'When you go to-morrow you'll see Tun up to its mark for the first time: worth seeing, that'll be. Here! cover yourself with this, and let's do a scamper. You and I'll see to the horses, and Tom shall fetch in the cows.'

As they went down to the hollow field, fire and water together made a mingled interlacement above their heads, too close and incessant for the eye to distinguish either element apart. The storm with heightened voice and thickened discharge seemed fighting for a foothold in those straightened valleys from its own wider domain: crushed together in the narrower space it poured like a torrent.

A thud of hoofs; and skirting a phantom hedge of ragged outline went a black body streaked with rain,– Blackbird charging in panic around the limits of his enclosure.

'Put the gate back into the hedge,' cried Dan, 'and then stand over to yonder gap and scare 'un off if he comes there!' So saying he darted off through blinding sheets of rain, while Daffy, obeying his directions, stood with strung

nerves expectant, and saw in the distance two vague forms drawing together, then parting, and heard now and again the hoof-stroke and call of contending forces.

Presently the forms met and joined, and across the open field came Dan riding barebacked; with a victorious shout he passed the posts, and Daffy, following hot foot, found Blackbird already stabled with his master rubbing him down. 'Sharp work, that!' said Dan, approving himself for once. 'Last year three of our beasts were struck down in a storm that only lasted half an hour; so now I get 'em to cover all I can. Ah! here come the cows.'

But though all were brought in, for the next two hours the farm seemed no safe place for man or beast. Again and again the thunder clapped like an extinguisher to the flash; and the sharp crackle of its discharge had scarcely tailed away when another commenced.

After going the rounds, and seeing that all was in order within his domain, Dan returned to the barn, closed the big doors, lighted a lantern, and went on composedly with his work. Outside those great timbers the storm could be heard beating itself out among the encircling hills; gradually the rain ceased; and only a dull and distant reverberation told that elsewhere the spirit of thunder was still alive.

Dan glanced across at his companion, and the intent look of listening suspense on the child's face drew him to ask, 'Well, Daffy, ever been in a thunderstorm before?'

'Never *out* in one, Uncle Dan! – not like that.'

'And what do you think of it now you have?'

'I liked it,' answered the boy solemnly.

'It didn't scare you too much?'

'No, I liked it,' he repeated, unable to explain to that great son of thunder how, at a post of trust, action and comradeship had changed terror into joy. For at the moment of call, when help was needed, Dan had not stayed to ask whether he was afraid; and Daffy had made no sign. What he had felt was a secret he kept to himself. But he knew now that he had, in his mind, faced death and had not been afraid.

'It'll be round again to-night,' said Dan, 'if I'm not mistaken. As often as not, when thunder gets to us here, it goes round and round – butter in a churn. Well! I've done my day's work now!'

With these words, laying his task aside, he went and threw open the doors.

Over the gathering dusk and the sop of drained leaves, reflections of the storm still flushed and paled again, and in the far-folded heavens, across dim layers of cloud, went a play of rosy fires.

'Yes,' he went on, regarding these signs with a weather-weighing eye, 'there'll be more of it later on. After that, like enough, we'll get wind, and then a touch of frost. I shouldn't wonder if it were fifteen or twenty degrees down before morning; that's the sort of change we get after storm in these parts. There's no knowing what might happen in a few hours' time.'

★

A few minutes later, when they went across to the house, candles were lighting for the evening meal. There in the big kitchen by the fire sat Maggie drying herself.

'Why, Maggie!' cried Dan in a surprised tone, 'have you come through all the storm? Why couldn't you have waited?'

'Because I'd started,' said Maggie; 'I wasn't going to stop – not for anybody.'

'Where's little Sue?'

'She wouldn't come. I suppose she was afraid.'

'I don't wonder! It was folly to start off in the face of such weather as that!'

Maggie gave a wriggle of impatience. 'I wanted to be quick so as to get here first:' she explained grudgingly. 'Why did she start at all if she didn't mean to come.'

'Start? D'you say she started?'

'Yes, the little goose! Then, when we'd gone a mile, stopped, and wanted to go back.'

'And you let her go alone, eh?'

'I let her do as she liked. *I* wasn't going back, not for anyone. If I hadn't got across the stones when I did, I should have had to go all round by the road. The river was up enough, even then. That's the last *I* saw of her: and all I care.'

Dan started to his feet. 'You left her there?' he cried.

Maggie flashed into temper at once. 'Well, *I* couldn't carry her across – she wouldn't let me! It was all her own fault!' Then for further self-justification she added, '*She* knows her way home well enough; or if she doesn't she can ask.'

She was for going on, but Dan cut her short. For a moment she faced his sharp questions in stubborn silence; but the insistent pressure of his examination proved too much for her; with a flash of angry spite, she gave up the contest and blurted out the truth.

'I tried to carry her,' she protested; 'but she kicked and fell in. After that she wouldn't go a step; and when I went back to bring her she ran away.'

'Back home, you mean?'

Maggie hesitated. 'No,' she said, 'when she saw me going on, she came back, and began to cry.'

'And that is where you left her?'

'I couldn't cross again; the water was rising fast.'

Dan questioned no further. Turning abruptly, he quitted the house and hurried across to the stables. Soon after, a sound of hoofs and harnessing caused Daffy to follow.

'May I come too?' he inquired, seeing Blackbird already bridled and out of stable; but Dan waved him off.

'No, no,' said he, 'I've to be quick!'

He threw himself into the saddle as he spoke, caught up the reins, and with a brief parting gesture galloped hastily away.

Daffy ran to the gate and watched him disappear. 'Good-bye, Uncle Dan,' he shouted; and thought, but was not sure, that an answering hail came back to him from below. Down into the valley went horse and rider, merged swiftly in the gathering shades of night; close behind them, black across the western heaven, came the stride of reverting storm.

When Daffy returned to the house, he found Maggie undergoing a further examination from Mrs. Lydiate. After her admission of the circumstances under which she and Sue had parted company, she was more ready to speak, urging her excuses in a tone of irritable complaint. Starting late, and already in haste to escape the approaching storm, she had called at the cottage of Sue's parents, and there, outside the shut-up house, had found the child already awaiting her, father and mother being out at work. Scarcely had they gone a mile when they met the first

downpour, though – according to Maggie – no more than the fringe of it, nothing that anyone need mind. But the fierce visage of black storm-clouds ahead was sufficient to arouse childish terrors; before long little Sue began to hang back,– after a time broke into pitiful rebellion, clamouring to return home.

Maggie,– not one to be thwarted – put on a faster pace, now dragging her small charge by the hand, now leaving her to the yet greater fear of being left solitary; once or twice quitting her with impatience she went recklessly ahead, then, being forced to wait, administered correction, and so imagined to have brought her back to discipline and reason.

Thus with scoldings and forced marches they arrived, one hour after setting forth, at Tun's fording-stones, to find its shallows already turbulent, with a flood steadily rising. It was here that compulsion proved a failure, for Maggie, though she tried, was unable to accomplish the crossing burdened with a child whose terror found vent in desperate strugglings. Over the second stone her foot slipped, and while she managed to save herself, small Sue, free from restraint, lost her balance and went under. Luckily in the part where she fell the water still ran shallow; the child, though drenched from head to foot, scrambled safely back to land, and up the bank fled wailing with Maggie in wrathful pursuit. But this time the little one had got the start, and so long as the chase lasted was having things her own way. So, there and then, at three miles from their first starting and two from their intended destination, Maggie turned and left her, and deaf to her cries, putting the rain-swollen river between them, came on alone.

That was the story; piece by piece Maggie justified herself in her own version while telling it. Yet even as it fell from her lips the tale looked black enough; and the farm-hands who, during its recital, had straggled in for the evening meal, held their peace at her, and when she had finished forbore from comment. Even before silence was broken she knew that all present had condemned her.

'God forgive you, Maggie,' said Mrs. Lydiate coldly, disdaining argument, 'to leave a small child like that alone in such a storm!'

'I didn't know how much it was going to be!' retorted Maggie sullenly. 'How could I know? If I hadn't got across when I did, I shouldn't have been home now.'

'Little Sue was farther from her home than you were,' remarked Mrs. Lydiate. 'You didn't think about that.'

Maggie huffed. 'I tried to carry her across,' said she. 'What more could I do? And then she pulls me in and does her best to drown me! It's small thanks I get, whatever I try to do:– there's always people pluming 'emselves to tell me I was wrong!'

'You had better go and change your things,' said Mrs. Lydiate, declining to pursue the discussion. 'It's no use trying to dry them here.'

Maggie retired to her room, and did not again rejoin the domestic circle. When the rest of the household had supped she came down, and without speaking to anyone helped herself to food from the larder, returning with a piled plate to her own chamber.

It was then nine o'clock; and the general bed-time for that early-rising household was approaching. Fresh storm smote upon the pane, but the thunder was more low and distant. One of the men looked out to remark that Mr.

Dan would be in for a second wetting before he got home again. He had then been gone since seven.

An hour later a man came up to the farm with words of what in the meantime had been taking place and also of good results. At Dan's instigation search-parties had been out over the district lying between Tunnock and Tun, and by one of these the child had been found in safe keeping. Following in Dan's track to bring him the welcome news the messenger had missed him on the road, after hearing that when last met he was again heading towards Tun. Arrived at the ford the man found it no longer passable on foot, so turning aside had come by the longer way. Quit of his errand he was now in haste to return: 'Maybe,' said he, 'I'll meet him on the road. He'll not get across river to-night. Tun's up; and for all I can see Kigarrow stone be clean gone!'

★

The story of Dan's swift goings through the earlier hours of that night was gathered from various sources at a later time. Leaving Lydiate's at seven, he was seen half an hour later following a devious course along the wooded banks of the Tun valley. Of all whom he met he inquired, and by them passed on word of the missing child.

A little before eight o'clock, with the sudden renewal of storm, he arrived at Sue's home, there to learn that the wanderer had not returned, and to bid the anxious parents go forth and rouse others to aid. Before long, in spite of the blinding rain, groups with lanterns were beating the country roads, and casting abroad through bare tack and tangled cover for traces of the missing atom.

Through their midst at intervals passed the swift rider, bringing, or bearing word to others, of places already

searched; between the hours of eight and nine he had carried the summons to more than a dozen remote or wayside dwellings, compelling their inmates to turn out and join in the quest. As ill-luck would have it, outside his circuit lay one solitary cottage, where in the charge of an old feeble-bodied crone and sharing her bracken bed slept the object of his search. There by one of the search-parties the child at last was found; and from them to others, before the night was old, the word passed gradually about.

A band of searchers, to whom the news had been thus conveyed, heard on their homeward return, an hour later, the tramp of galloping hoofs in the valley below. They shouted, sending forth at a venture the prearranged signal cry; but without slack the travelling sound drew away into distance, and outvoiced by the noise of hurling waters died amid the woody windings of upper Tun.

Meanwhile Lydiate's, relieved of all further fear for the child's safety, resumed its normal habits: those of the farm-hands who had sat up expectant of news went off to their slumbers, and Mrs. Lydiate, staying only to dispose of certain household affairs, bade Daffy wait up no more.

The boy was reluctant to go, for this was his last night, and great was his longing to stay and give greeting to his uncle on his return. But in Dan's absence the grand-dame's word was law; and after a faint appeal uttered in vain, he retired to his cubicle, and there slowly undressed, inventing for himself during the process many excuses for delay, and to the last listening and peering under the drawn blind in the expectation of seeing Blackbird come up the yard, bearing his master home.

In the end, long standing in nothing but his shirt wrought

discomfiture of spirit: cold and disheartened he crept into bed, but not to sleep.

Eleven had just struck when, an hour later, the old dame came herself to seek rest, and to qualify by her unseen presence the deep depression of the boy's spirit. Through the low wooden partition he heard the quiet movements of age and the laying aside of raiment; then came a short silence for prayer, followed by slight creakings as the great bedstead which had seen so many births and bridals received its now solitary occupant.

No night-taper burned, but a late moon had risen and its dim light entering through the blind, conveyed to the chamber shadowy indications of form. Being wakeful the child felt the hunger of loneliness: queer noises crept about the house, as though under the weight of so many sleepers a gradual subsidence was taking place among its beams.

True to Dan's word the wind had, with a falling temperature, now risen; doors shook and casements rattled, and though rain and thunder had passed a voice of disturbance was still abroad. Only at one point did the child's brain take in a sense of rest: away in her own quarter of the chamber in canopied state, the old dame lay still, awaiting sleep,— so still that a desire to gaze on composure so enviable and so profound began to take hold of him.

Cautiously, lest his own motions should disturb that transitional stage of somnolence, the child turned himself about on his small couch; drawing his pillow after him he reversed his position, and so with head where feet had been, found satisfaction of his desire. Thus placed, with a little straining of the neck he could see from the corner of his own crib the recumbent figure whose motionless peace had attracted him. As he watched his interest grew: old

age thus seen acquired a new aspect, awakening an emotion he was unable to define. Secret observance by the unobserved tends always to quicken the faculty; and so it was that he observed now things he had never thought of observing before. He noticed the neat folding of the clothes, the two shoes side by side, the old-fashioned cap pendent from its stand, and the bed so orderly in its array over the sunk and straightened figure of its occupant. On a table by the bed the dull moon-face of the low ticking clock loomed and faded again. He tried to make out the position of the hands, but was baffled by the pervading obscurity. He could see, yet could not see: the darkness seemed to wave in mesmeric passes before his eyes motioning him away from the scrutiny to which he constantly returned. Presently he was aware that he had been close on sleep. Called out of that unconsciousness by an eddy of sound he heard blending with it the nasal drone of slumber of the men up aloft. But it was outside not inside sound that had awakened him. The wind, with gathering force, seemed suddenly to have attacked the house from a fresh quarter, and now with the dull thud of a heavy fist, it smote on the leaded pane. So sudden and so full of purpose seemed the blow that the child held his breath. But the ears of the sleeper under the great canopy were weather-proof, and he with his fears and apprehensions was all alone. His old trick of reasoning aloud to his own heart for comfort reasserted itself. 'Don't be afraid!' he whispered, 'it won't open.'

The figure in the bed sprang and sat erect. 'Daniel,' it cried, 'is that you?'

Like a culprit the child got up to confess, appalled at the disturbance he had caused.

'No, it was me, Granny!' he said.

'Go and let him in!' said the other, and lay down again. She had not really been awake.

The child looked toward the bed, wondering whether the mandate was to be obeyed; no further sign was vouchsafed him, the silence was again absolute.

But the sleeper's command, and the dead silence that followed it, weighed upon his heart like a voice out of the grave. Go and let him in? Yes, it was evident he must go. He took up his coat and slung it about his shoulders, securing it by a single button at the neck; for added warmth he drew another garment about his waist, and so half-clad crept across the room.

The circumstances of his mission filled him with a curious fear, arising from uncertainty as to what he ought really to do. He was afraid to go through the empty house alone, yet was more afraid of leaving unfulfilled an order so strangely given. Least of all dared he rouse the sleeper to secure fresh instruction. Stealthily, in the keenest apprehension lest now she should awaken, he turned the handle of the door, and ventured forth into a passage of cupboard-like darkness. Soon, feeling his way past cellar steps on the left, he entered and crossed the kitchen: under his feet he felt the hard ribs of the cold upright slags which formed its paving, and away to the right saw a faint eye of fire,– a few sunk embers that seemed in dull semi-consciousness to be looking at him. Presently his foot touched the warmth of a cat's fur where in the darkness she crouched watching for mice. She did not move to get out of his way: here for a while humanity was out of place, and his coming at that nocturnal hour seemed not to count.

Coming into contact with the house door he laid his hand

upon the key, only to find that no unlocking was needed: unfastened, it awaited Daniel's return. Why, then, had he been sent? He pulled up the latch and swung the door wide.

Night fronted him in dark and dishevelled motion; against the sky were dim forms flung low in the wind; and there on the sill of the outer porch stood Dan quietly regarding him, awaiting admission yet making no advance. Feet to threshold he stood: over one arm hung a horse's bridle, his hair was wet, his garments clung to him as though he had come through deep waters,– and though the door was open he did not come in.

That strange immobility checked before utterance the child's cry of welcome; fearing to speak, with heart oppressed, he stood anxiously at gaze: eyes of a strange sparkle and light met his. And as once more he caught the comfort of their kindly and familiar glance, suddenly he knew, without a doubt, that he was only looking at stars, seen for a moment in the rushing torrent of a wind-driven sky.

Tears blinded him. He crept back to bed, but not to sleep,– got into it clothes and all, stuffing into his mouth some corner of a garment, lest the miserable sound of his grief should break his grandmother's slumber and expose to question that which to no human ear could be told. And the next day, his visit being ended – and at an early hour because the journey was long – he started upon his homeward way.

Up till the sad hour of his departure, elders still told, for the comfort of childish ears, a foolish tale, fondly invented, of why Dan had not yet returned. But Daffy did not need the dark and malignant eye of Maggie to inform him

that that tale was false. Love is far wiser than hate, and no one knew the truth more certainly than he.

As he drove past the ford, sure enough the Kigarrow stone was down: nothing remained to mark its place. So he passed from the scene of his romance. Nor at a later day did news ever reach him of Dan's return, nor was trace of him ever found.

Old legends live long and die a natural death; sometimes, in an age that has ceased to breed them, we see how legends might arise. But of Dan, than this, no more is known; and only in one heart is this story of him told.

V

Man and Dog

When Farmer Brod had finished burying his dog Gann, he went back to a lonely hearth; for he was a hard man, and had no friend left in the world. In stiff frozen ground he had dug the grave by the side of a small wood, and to ensure that which it held to safe keeping had refilled it with rubble and earth well beaten down, and at the half-way had set a heavy stone, and over all ditch-turf and brier. So he made sure that Gann, after fifteen years of faithful service, should remain his possession still.

It was late when he returned; the fire was out, and there was no wood left in the house to rekindle it. So, leaving the door on the latch, he went across to the wood-shed and gathered an armful of fresh fuel. This took him some time, for his store had run nearly out: nursing his dog Gann, he had let everything else on the farm go uncared for. When he got back the house was already in darkness; the wood he had brought in was damp, and the fire was long in lighting. He coaxed it with muttered cursings; but when at length the fuel kindled, the fire still hung back, giving but little flame.

Weary and chill, he sat down at last to rest, and then saw over against him, on the farther side of the ingle, a little wizened old man, leaning on a shepherd's crook, motionless and with fixed gaze, like one lost in thought. The sight gave him a turn, for all the time he had spent over the fire the stranger must have sat there watching him; and yet he had not known.

Brod did not keep open house; no neighbours unbidden would ever enter his door, and to strangers it gave no wel-

come. Yet there the old man sat, as though at his own hearth, watching the smoke rise from the faggots, and resting upon the head of his crook two hands and his chin. So still he sat that for a while Brod eyed him in doubt, and, not from any kindness, forbore to utter a word.

Presently, without turn of head or recognizing glance, the stranger spoke. 'So you've lost your dog?' he said.

Brod answered with a surly grunt, then sighed. There was silence between them for awhile. Then the stranger spoke again.

'Was he worth having – your dog?'

It made Brod angry to be asked such a question as that. The man must be a fool not to have heard of his dog Gann. 'He was the best,' he answered, 'that ever you set eyes on: though you never did. If you had, you would have known.'

Slowly and meditatively the stranger drew his crook across the ashes of the hearth. 'How did you come by him?' he asked – 'your dog?'

Brod did not answer; but his mind went back to the day when on a lonely road, far from the habitations of men, he had seen Gann for the first time – a solitary dog, quiet of tongue, herding before him a great flock of sheep, and with no shepherd in sight. Brod and Gann had looked at each other and passed; but it was Brod only who afterward turned to look back; and as he watched, not for the great herd itself was the covetous hunger which from that moment filled his heart and took possession of his soul.

That night two hundred sheep lay in the village pound waiting an owner's claim; but when weeks went by and no owner appeared, the herd was put up to auction and was bought in lots by the holders of neighbouring farms.

Some of them were bought by Brod himself; and not long after neighbours noticed that as he went about his work he had with him a new dog. Gann in those days was still young, but already he was wiser than most, and as he grew ripe in years his wisdom increased: near or far he saw with his master's eye, and the two worked together with a single mind.

Thus through the past, backward, then forward, Brod's thoughts had carried him. He came back once more to present loss – the light of memory went out: Gann was dead, and the world seemed no longer alive.

'How did you come by him?' the stranger asked again – 'your dog?'

'I paid a heavy price for him,' answered Brod; 'that's how! . . . Who are you?'

Again the old man stirred the ashes with his staff. 'I was a bit of a dog-fancier myself once,' he said. 'I've made good dogs in my day; and as I've made 'em, I reckon they've stayed – though I was not there to see. For the breeder's the true maker, where the buyer is but the user. Yet you that have only used a dog for fifteen years, even you, I reckon, might be glad to have him back again!'

'Who said fifteen years?' demanded Brod, suspiciously, casting upon the stranger an unfriendly regard.

'It's like a piece of your own life,' the other went on, not heeding him. 'When you are least willing to part from it, it goes. With this old staff of mine I broke in as good a dog as any you ever saw. Miles away over down, wherever he might be, I had but to hold this up to him and he knew what to do. One day it broke in my hand – broke as I held it up calling for him: he never came to me after that. There's the break in it still.' He held up the crook

as he spoke. 'There's blood on it,' he muttered, 'there's blood. But the man I marked with it went free; and I'm nowhere now.'

Brod got up hastily from his seat and drove his foot into the piled faggots that gave out so little flame. 'Who are you?' he demanded, in harsh tone.

But the old man seemed hard of hearing and, without heed to the interruption, went on. 'I'm thinking,' he said, 'that dog of mine must be dead by now – same as yours. Yet if I knew where he lay, I need but to go and scrape at the ground – like this; and I reckon he'd hear me, and come to his old master's call. Would your dog do the same for you?'

So low he spoke, and sat so still, he seemed scarcely awake; his voice had fallen to a strange monotone, and its note was withered and dry. But as the word ended he got up and shuffled to the door with the slow, feeble motion of limbs that had lain long out of use. On the sill he turned in a sudden heat, and snapping his staff, threw the shaft of it across the room.

'There, dog-thief, there!' he shouted. 'Take it and try for yourself! You know where he lies – your dog!' He flung through the door, pulled it after him, and was gone. The fire broke into bright flame, and threw its ruddy warmth over the dark beams and mud-plastered walls.

Brod wiped the cold sweat from his brow; then he went across, took up the staff, and examined it. There, just where head and shaft had joined, was a clean break; but the break was not new. The wood was black and sodden as though it had lain a long time underground; fibres of peat clung to it, and when struck it gave back the

hollow note of dead timber. Even as he touched the broken end it began to crumble in his hand. He sat down again, and resting the staff against his knees, began to think hard. He thought of Gann, with faithful glance, watchful to beck and call – Gann, from whom, since their first chance meeting, he had not been parted for a single hour, till earth itself had come with dead weight and made division between them. Had Gann, he wondered now, remembered always what he had striven to forget; was it possible that hidden in that dumb heart had lain an older allegiance, to which, after all these years, mouldering flesh and bone were now free to return? This way and that he twisted the staff in his hands, and found it hard to lay it down again. Its cold touch brought back to life a buried memory – the figure of a small, elderly man, alert, wiry, resolutely braced, standing with his back to a broad dike, fighting for his life. Well and stubbornly had he fought, though overmatched, till at a blow the staff broke in his hand. Then, all too late, he had cried for help: 'Gann! Gann!' and fell crying it. Before that help came, man and staff were well out of sight, sunk in the black peat mud; and whether of murder or mishap no sign was left to reveal the truth to eyes that came after.

In that place of death, dragged back to land from his vain efforts to save, Gann had found a new master; and never from then until this present hour had Brod doubted his own absolute possession of that for which he had bartered his soul. But now at last a doubt had come, overwhelming, not to be borne. With angry reasonings he tried to put it away, but it only returned to him with double force; the fever of it shook his brain, the uncertainty of what he could not test by bodily sense filled him with

dread. He grew fearful of passing time – of what might have taken place in a few hours of separation between living and dead. If he could only be sure that the grave was still as he had left it, he would be content to wait; afterward he would search deeper and see.

Staff in hand he went to the door and looked out; but the pitch blackness of night drove him in again, for there in the darkness and until cock-crow a dead man's eyes might be awake, waiting to spy out the place of burial and steal away the one possession of worth left to him in the world. The risk was too great; he must wait for dawn before he dare go abroad. So, staff in hand, he returned to the ingle, and there in a black mood, desolate and hungry of heart, sat out the night.

In the grey of morning he rose, and taking the staff with him, came by track and ditch to the woodside grave. The ground lay just as he had left it, bearing for proof the print of his own feet. Through the thicket of brier he thrust in the dead man's staff and scraped at the trodden turf. 'Gann! Gann!' he called, softly. He waited; there was no sound, no sign.

Again he scraped and again called, and still there came no answer. Then his hope went; yet for the third time, to make failure more sure, dispirited and heavy of heart, he drew the shaft over the ground and uttered no call.

This time, expecting nothing, he did not wait; with the growing light of day common sense returned to him; he remembered the close-trodden rubble and the heavy stone set half-way, and, setting his teeth at his own folly, turned again to the track and moved slowly on without goal or aim. But as he turned there came a rustle in the thicket behind him, and slow and feeble, broken with age and

stiff of limb, out crept Gann, and with lowered head and defaulting glance stood drooping before him.

There was a strange guilt in his look: he stood for all the world like a dog convicted of sheep-murder; his nose and his fore paws were stained with red clay, and in the hair about his eyes hung loose loam. Uneasy he stood, furtive of mien as though his master were the last person he had expected to meet.

Brod looked at him with a discomforted mind: this was not the greeting he had hoped; and the sudden chill which fell upon his spirit began already to take the form of reproach and accusation against Gann. But Brod was a man of few words, and never in his life had his heart taught speech to his tongue; so now what he felt, he wished that another should tell. 'Well, Gann,' said he, 'are you glad to see your master again?'

The dog hung his head and gave a perfunctory wag to his tail, but made no further response; and there, so long as Brod eyed him, he stood, passive, submissive, keeping his distance, waiting meekly the word of command. In this common powerlessness to show what was in the heart, dog and man had become more like than ever before; yet to Brod it seemed an injury – something in Gann which he could not understand.

Long and hard Brod stared, but never once would the dog meet his eye. When presently Brod snapped his fingers, he crept close up to heel, and there meekly halted, still with unlifted head, and with no sign of recognition or rejoicing.

Heavily Brod mused, knitting his thick brows to unaccustomed thought; and in a while found a reason for it all. Surely Gann was not yet awake; death was a deep-seated

ill – a habit hard to shake off; day was not up, and the scent of the world lay cold. He had yet to feel the warmth of the sun, and to hear the sheep calling on the down, and the barking of other dogs; then memory would return, and old Gann would be himself again.

So, to stifle the rising doubt, Brod eased his mind; he clicked his tongue in the old familiar manner. 'We'll go a round,' said he, and set off; and slow to move, as a thing stirred by its own weight and not by its own will, Gann gathered up his feet one by one and followed after.

Mounting the rough track, they gained a level ridge; half a mile to their right westward ran a higher broadside of hill, grey fleeces of mist still lay in the valley between. Across the cold bleak face of a wintry world, light and warmth and sound welled forth to meet them; hares ran in the hollows, plovers cried in the open, game-bird started from cover, moorhen from water; and out of the lowland mists, with bark and bleat, came the cry of an unseen shepherd driving his flock to field. But Gann took no note of any of these things; and though his master cheered him on with word and sign, never once did he range ahead, or quicken pace, or turn aside from his meek plodding course at his master's heels.

And now above bars of mist up rose the sun and threw the shadow of the ridge along which they moved against the opposing hill; out from under his feet Brod saw his own shadow gauntly bestriding the ground, the far ends of it melting away in mist and light, and on the farther slope no sign of it at all; yet across the facing hill where the shade of the ridge ended and where sunlight struck warm – there, like an unlaid ghost, walked the shadow of Gann, black, distinct, horrible.

Brod, when he saw that sight, turned sharply about. 'Don't be like that, Gann!' he cried. 'Don't be like that! Shake 'em off! Shake 'em off! You've the maggots on you still.' But Gann only looked up at him with dull, indifferent eyes, that seemed vaguely to wait for a meaning, and failing to find it, once more became blank.

Brod resumed his course, and heard again behind him the stealthy sound of Gann's feet meekly following. That sound of feet, linked with the familiar form, seemed all that Gann had brought back with him from the grave. It was not enough: nay, if that were all, it was like the offer of stone to the hungry in place of bread; for if the spirit be absent, the form becomes a mere mimicry – no longer the expression but the contradiction of life; and if Gann's bodily shape had come only to tell him that the spirit would never return, better by far had it been for him never to have set eyes on it. Yet every time that he did so the hunger of possession filled his heart, and his mind bent itself with avaricious grasp never to admit defeat – never to let go, while he could still hold it, that shadow of the substance for which he yearned.

So, turning his back on discomfiture, he moved stubbornly on; and over against him on the opposing slope went the shadow of Gann, black, distinct, horrible.

Brod, watching its motion and the slow lifting of its feet, felt a fierce hatred toward it rising in his blood. With the instinct to be rid of it he quitted the exposed ridge and descended the westward slope where down below the ground lay swallowed in mist. Presently like a blank wall it rose before him, blind, passive, yet powerful: committed to its keeping, strong limbs had now to halt and grope their way; the eyes lost their directing sense, the ears grew con-

fused by the drift of sound; only the instinct of gravity – the drag of earth on the ever-descending weight – remained unimpaired. Man and dog went down together into that thick sea, and instantaneously, as though struck by blindness, were parted from each other's sight. Looking back, halting and peering, Brod could no longer be sure whether he was followed or no; and all at once the idea came to him to make test whether Gann still possessed that gift of scent for which in the old days he had been famous. If he did, there was more reality under the dull surface than had yet appeared, and the rest would follow with time.

So, careless of peril to life and limb, Brod turned sharply aside from the downward way; broke at a double through dank thicket and fern – came presently on furze-bush, sprang over it, and missing his footing on the farther side, fell, rolled, pitched headlong to an oozy tangle of reeds, and, bruised and bleeding, found stay at last in the bed of a small runnel whose course followed the base of the declivity.

His tumble had carried him to level ground much faster than he could have run; it had also brought him clear of the denser drift of mist which now lay overhead. Here in a narrow circumference he could see about him vague forms of stone, grass-mound, and thicket, and already, detaching itself from these, another form gliding stealthily toward him – Gann, listless of foot, unhurried of pace, who, on arrival, drooped to a halt, and stood unconcerned as ever at his master's side.

Brod picked himself up with some difficulty, but had found reward for his pains. 'Well, Gann,' said he, 'so you've kept your nose, after all. It was no use trying to deceive me. Off with your vapours, lad! We'll get the

maggots out of you yet.' He reached out a hand and, contrary to old habit (for seldom had they exchanged tokens of affection in the past), sought by friendly touch to win recognition and response. But with a slight shrinking the dog drew aside, and evading the proffered caress, resumed his former attitude of meek submissive attendance on an owner's will.

Once more Brod's mind became clouded with doubt; for again it seemed clear that, as regards their old intimacy of the past, Gann had only come back to him in blank form – obedient from long habit, docile from age, but with a worn-out mind from which the meanings and values of life had been utterly erased. Well, if that were so, he must again be trained, broken of underground ways, given work to do that would bring old instincts to life, and awake in the earthbound brain a new spirit. So long as Gann would follow, his master would lead. Patience, patience! Time would send them a cure.

Brod's brain, unaccustomed to problems, worked slow; but when at last he had reached his conclusion he became once more the man of action.

To put the matter to a certain test forthwith he bent his steps along the stream's upward course, and came, after a winding mile, to a slender fall, above which in a hollow of the downs lay a field enclosed by hurdles. The ground was strewn with a litter of root-refuse rimed with frost; in one corner stood a wooden shed, and about it in square extension a thickly wattled fold. Brod had not visited his flock for many days; while nursing the sick Gann he had hired a farm-hand to look after it. Like enough the man had neglected his task, for at the first sound of bleating his ear told him that the sheep had gone ill fed. He pulled back a

hurdle and entered the enclosure; he and Gann stood once more together on the old familiar ground. There in narrow space threescore sheep lay closely huddled for warmth; and every one of them man and dog knew by record and name. As Brod pushed in among them they rose and scattered; sighting one that went lame, he looked at Gann and nodded across. In the old days that would have been enough; now to make his meaning more clear he pointed also and spoke. 'Fetch her out, Gann!' said he. 'It's yon black ewe that I want.' But no sooner had he uttered the words than once more his heart sank within him and hope died, for Gann stood as though deaf and blind, making no sign at all.

Brod shook his head like a dumb beast recovering from a blow, and, turning about, went softly out of the fold. 'Past work,' he muttered. 'Past work; I ought to have known.' So for his own comfort he stated the case, still seeking to put off for a while the darker doubt; but as he went up the hill he trod heavily as one on whom age had laid a sudden hand. Now and again he halted and looked back on Gann, making advance with friendly sign and speech; yet never once – though he looked often, and waited expecting it – never once did Gann look up at him in return with recognizing glance.

Hour after hour the two wandered together aimlessly over the downs, till the short winter's day crept back to dusk. Then, weary and dispirited, Brod turned his steps for home; and again there came back to him a flicker of hope accompanied by an added dread. Perhaps, after all, food and warmth and shelter would do for Gann what sun and sound and open air had failed to do; then again, perhaps not. Still, he could but try.

It was already deep twilight when Brod passed the wood

and the thicket beneath which he had laid the body of Gann. Glancing furtively, he could see that the mould lay undisturbed; nothing was displaced that had been set there to keep guard. He whistled Gann on, and with pretence of cheer quickened his pace; but a moment later he missed the sound of following feet. He turned sharply about, saw Gann standing on the edge of the thicket, saw him slink softly into cover of its shade, ran back, only to find that he was gone and not a trace of him left.

Long and vainly did he call, stroking the ground with his staff; there came no sign or sound; around him settled the gathering darkness of night. Then he remembered his fear of a dead man's eye, and leaving the tell-tale spot, went back solitary to a cold hearth. Yet even then he did not doubt that of which the next day brought proof – that the staff had still power to bring back the dead to life. Only with nightfall death resumed its sway, and the weary body and dull brain went back to their rest.

In the days and weeks that followed, people who lived in those parts saw, for long hours, Brod and his dog Gann roaming the countryside. If any spoke to him in passing, he returned no answer. Head down and slow of foot he went, leaning heavily on his staff; and, head down, at heel went Gann with ears and tail drooped. Some said that they walked like a pair of mourners bearing a dead body between, the same distance ever dividing them; and all who came on them noted at that time how Brod had aged.

It was evident indeed that he was past work, for never now was he seen tending his sheep or labouring upon the farm. Once a week the man he had hired came to receive his wage; there it lay waiting for him; there sometimes was Brod, but to his man the master had never a word to say.

Ewes died and lambs were born, rot and disease found their way into the herd; and still Brod – he who had been the best sheep-farmer in all that countryside – did nothing nor seemed to care.

Often now he sat through the midday hours on the sunny side of the downs, and while he sat, there stood Gann at his side, without will or expectancy, with head submissively drooped, yet always afoot as if waiting to go. Then out of his pouch Brod would take food and begin slowly to eat, now and then throwing a portion to his companion, but Gann never owned to hunger; where it fell, there he let it lie. Brod would seem not to notice, and would go on throwing to Gann just so much as he reckoned to be his due, but whether it were little or much, meat or bread, made no difference to Gann: never when they were together did Brod see him eat. Sometimes, when he himself had finished, pointing to the food which lay untouched, he would begin to threaten and curse; but whatever he might do, Gann paid no attention and showed no fear; and deep down in Brod's heart a new feeling began to grow and have life – hatred of Gann. Gann would not eat at his hand, would not sit down by his side, would not enter his door, would neither go nor come to his call, yet wherever he went followed him like his own shadow, submissive yet furtive, without resistance, yet without consent. And ever with slow, labouring mind Brod sought by roundabout ways to find the root of that strange passive opposition which gave the nearest proof that life yet hung in the dumb brain.

Now for whole days together man and dog showed no recognition of each other's presence, save only that where the one led the other followed.

One day toward noon, as man and dog stood on a sunward slope, their two shadows lay side by side on the warm and friendly earth, showing amid the surrounding light no difference of kind. Presently, as he glanced back, Brod chanced to raise hand and staff, and saw, all in a moment, lying across Gann's shadow a blot of double shade. There, black as a crow perched on a pole, the shape of his own hand grasping the broken shaft. With a cold creep of the flesh he drew his hand away, shifted, and stood farther off; and with meek acquiescence, as though his business were never to quit his master's side, Gann, too, shifted his ground and again stood near. Here, coupled with fresh evidence of a malign power, ever obscure yet only waiting a touch to become revealed, was expression of the thing which Brod could not abide. This parasitic loyalty that brought with it no sign of affection, no proof of will, was becoming horrible to him; and as he backed, again with slow methodical motion, Gann stirred and followed, always keeping the same distance, as though in between them a dead body went borne. In a fit of uncontrollable loathing Brod lifted the staff and swung it around.

'Keep off, you damned carcass!' he cried. 'Don't shake your maggots on me!'

Fiercely driven, the staff whistled in air, and as it grazed by him – scarcely believable, yet true! – Gann with a sudden snatch bared his teeth and emitted a low growl.

Brod's arm, swung up for a second stroke, hung rigid in air; he stared triumphant, yet aghast; saw for a moment, before they shrank, Gann's glowering eyes meet his own. 'Body alive!' he muttered. 'So I've made you speak at last!'

And to think that he had only discovered it now! All

this time, without knowing it, the power had been his; old kindness and pity had made him refrain, but now at last the way lay plain: something was there waiting to be conquered after all, only needing for its control a resolute will and a firm hand.

Now that he knew, his old affections returned, all hatred went out of his heart; tears started strangely to his eyes; he held out a cajoling hand, spoke softly, foolishly, seeking by endearing terms to draw Gann to his side that they might renew once more the confidence and intimacy of former days. It troubled him little that for the moment Gann had returned to his former indifference; for now Brod *knew*, had seen and heard, and had for his comfort henceforth sure and certain proof.

He lifted his head and strode on, a new man; and ever as he went he turned and looked at Gann with eyes of love. He thought of the morrow; to-morrow they two would begin life afresh; but to-night – what of to-night?

The fierce joy of possession had re-entered his heart; never again would he let Gann go. The power lay there in his hand if he only knew how to use it; that was what he must find out.

Descending the hill, by a place of lime-quarries, they came to a deep gully, only a few feet wide; steep walls of limestone rose on either side, between which the only foothold lay in a narrow channel scoured by rains. Greatly venturing, Brod let the staff go out of his hand – it fell and lay crosswise from wall to wall. Presently he knew that Gann was no longer following; he turned about and saw his surmise verified. There where the staff lay Gann waited, stock-still, unable to pass. Brod whistled and called, but it was no use; his voice passed to unheeding ears.

Beside the staff that crossed his way Gann stood sentinel.

Blithely Brod returned, caught up the staff, and swung resolutely on. He knew now what he would do; never again would he and Gann be parted at dusk; never again should that dark bed of mould sap out the comfortable warmth of life from body and brain. Was it any wonder, with such cold lodging, that Gann had remained a corpse?

As soon as they were come to the base of the lime-quarries Brod set to work; foraging this way and that, he collected fuel – brier, dried fern, heath, and a few faggots. These he heaped in the far corner of a disused lime-kiln, of which only the outer shell now remained. To and fro he went through the ruined breach till his pile of fuel grew high, and to and fro at heel went Gann. Presently, as he emerged to bring in his last load, Brod turned sharp about and thrust his staff across the entrance of the kiln, wedging it from side to side. And there, sure enough, where the staff lay wedged, stood Gann unable to pass; enclosed around and above by the curved and conical walls, there was no other way by which he could escape.

The brief winter's day was already wearing to its close; Brod was weary with toil and the heavy strain of a mind divided between hope and fear. Bearing his last armful of fuel, he stooped to the low doorway, overstepped the shaft. As he entered, Gann backed. Did Gann, then, already suspect him? Even that would be something gained, better than the indifference which, during the past weeks, had laid its leaden weight upon their dis-jointed lives. Brod was prepared to encounter in Gann's nature, as it awoke, a resistance and an opposition which had not been there before; for he knew that something lay behind – something which, when now and then he

came on it unawares, had in it the touch and horror of death – something which Gann harboured and which lay close hidden, biding its time, save when in shadowy form it crept from its lair, faced him for a moment with blank, featureless mask, and again withdrew. But Brod did not shrink from any struggle that lay ahead; so long as there was something to be broken he cared not how hard the breaking might prove.

Weary of body, but resolute of will, having kindled the fire, he sat down, and leaning his back against the side of the kiln, disposed himself for rest. He sat by the opening, the wedged staff under his hand, and watched in the growing warmth of the firelight the gradual extinction of the cold hues of outer day. Before long, almost without knowing it, he had closed his eyes; sleep was near, but a corner of his mind still lay awake; the warmth drifted into his brain – warmth and the sense of renewed possession of the thing that he loved. The sun had set, but Gann was with him still.

Under his hand the staff quivered, gave a slight turn, grating upon the brickwork in which it stood fixed. Quick but without stir Brod opened his eyes; there was Gann, working with gripped jaws wrenching to get free.

Brod sat up. 'Gann,' he said, 'you go and lie down!'

Gann drew back his head with a start, stood fixed for a moment with averted look; then, slow and listless, broken of will, went to the farther side of the fire and lay down.

Brod took a grip of the staff to make sure that it was still well fixed; then, shifting nearer, clasped his hand over it and again leaned back to rest. For a while he kept close watch upon Gann; but when an hour had gone by and the

dog still lay without motion, he again closed his eyes and, with ear awake for the least sound, sank into light slumber. Before long he had lost clear count of time; but though his senses drowsed, brain and consciousness lay awake. Presently, while his body thus hung on the verge of sleep, thought again grew active; what, he wondered behind shut eyes, is Gann doing now? Cautiously he half raised his lids, and through the lowered lashes saw in the sunk glow of the firelight Gann steadily watching him. There could be no doubt now that Gann's brain was coming to life: nay, not brain alone; every nerve of his body was alert as when some creature of the chase watches its prey.

Presently Gann's body began to move, following the direction of his eyes; belly to earth, with limbs rigidly extended and head slightly raised, he drew himself inch by inch over the ground, nearer and nearer to his master's side.

Brod was a man of iron nerve; courage with him had become a habit; but as he watched the stealthy advance of Gann, a strange dread took possession of his soul. It was not the formidable teeth that he feared – those he could face and fight; it was the mind, the brain, the enmity at last clearly manifest in the only form of life he had ever passionately loved. Now at last he knew that Gann and he were at war, but what the fight was to be, to what end or how waged, that he did not know.

Gann was now quite close; there at Brod's feet were the eyes waiting to spring; but the body in which they were bound remained servile, reptilian, knit to the ground like a great hairy caterpillar that seemed only waiting to put out its suckers and climb. A cold shudder went over Brod as Gann rose and became four-footed once more; very gently

he set feet to his master's knees, raised himself up and looked into his face. Where the weight of the feet rested, Brod felt two spots of cold; the dog's nose almost touched his face, but there fell upon it no warmth of breath. Steadily but furtively he looked out under sunk lashes, and saw Gann's eyes turned searchingly upon his. A great fever burned in them; for while around in the throb of the falling firelight went alternations of light and shade, there, and there only, glowed a steady flame; and clear in its midst as a carved cameo some form of definite import that did not move or change. What it might be Brod could not read, for his sunk glance gave but an obscure vision to his brain, and his eyes were disconcerted by the flickering reflections of firelight on the walls around him. Presently, however, it sank to a dull glow, and at once the form confronting him grew more intense. Brod threw open his eyes, thrust forward his head, and with held breath stared hard. For one instant man and beast met eye to eye; and even as Gann shrank and turned aside with guilty look, Brod saw clear – with a distinctness of impression that nothing could efface – a small wizened figure of a man leaning on a shepherd's crook, motionless and with fixed gaze like one lost in thought.

Gann had sprung off and was standing his distance again as Brod leaped to his feet; but though he looked at his master with conscious eye, he looked as one that had had his will, and the word of reproach that followed did not cause him to shrink.

'So,' said Brod, dull and heavy of tone, 'you would pick my brains, would you? Go your way, Gann; play me that trick again and I pick yours!'

Without change of glance or stir of limb Gann heard him

out to the last word; then turned indifferently away and lay down.

'I'll break you!' Brod called after him, 'every bone! You shall know where you belong before I've done with you.' Then he reheaped the fire, and returning to his place, lay down. When he rose up once more morning was abroad.

He took up the staff and made his way out of the kiln; nor did he trouble now to see whether Gann would follow him. In a few moments he heard behind the soft pad of the feet, and with a new purpose in mind he set his face for home.

Following the track to the farm, they came close to the grave, and Brod looked about to see what effect it might have on Gann; but Gann, looking neither to right nor left, strolled indifferently by. Brod was well satisfied.

'I'll teach him yet!' he said to himself, and gave a confident grip to his staff.

And now they were come to the door which Gann, since his return to life, had never yet entered. Brod unlocked and threw it open. He waited; and so did Gann, head down, giving back to his master neither sign nor glance.

'Get you in!' cried Brod, harsh of tongue, and with sudden threatening gesture lifted the staff as though about to strike.

Gann backed; and Brod, no longer loath, reached out and struck heavily with all his force. Half blind with rage, he had scarcely taken aim; only when the staff touched ground did he know that he had missed.

With a sound of inarticulate fury Gann turned; his eyes blazed into life, his back bristled, his limbs grew knit, his

teeth lined out to a savage grin. Here was battle at last; the tug of war had come!

'Come on, then!' shouted Brod; 'come on!' and bracing himself for fight, swung up the staff for a heavier blow. Here at last was a game which two could play, and in which the weaker will must own defeat. The joy of battle surged through his blood. 'Come on! Come on, then!' he cried again; and Gann crouched and quivered, hot and ready to spring.

Leaping beast and descending stroke crashed together in mid-air. Teeth met wood; and, quicker than eye could see, with a rending sound of flying splinters, teeth prevailed, and Brod's hands lay empty of power. Dry and rotten to its core, the staff, shivered to a thousand fragments, lay strewn to earth. Out of its centre a small puff of dust floated derisively away through the frosty air. Brod stood weaponless now; but there was no longer any need: Gann's rage was spent.

Feebly he turned from the field he had won and crawled painfully away – a sight horrible to the eye. There was no mistaking him now: gaunt and festering death stared out of each rib; his head hung like a bucket on a string, dripping moisture as it went; each limb in turn on which he rested his weight gave under him like sodden clay. Thrice he fell staggering and blind, and thrice he rose and again struggled on.

His master could have had him now, for there was no power left in him by which he could resist. But the staff of mastery was gone, and Brod had only to look to know that Gann was gone too.

So to second burial went Gann, bearing back a most faithful body to the grave. Brod, following him afar, saw

him enter the thicket and there lay himself down. But when later he drew near, no sign of the body was left; only he saw in the ground the marks of his own feet.

And so was finished, after so many months, the burying of his dog Gann; and when all was done, Farmer Brod went back to a lonely hearth; for he was a hard man and had no friend left in the world.